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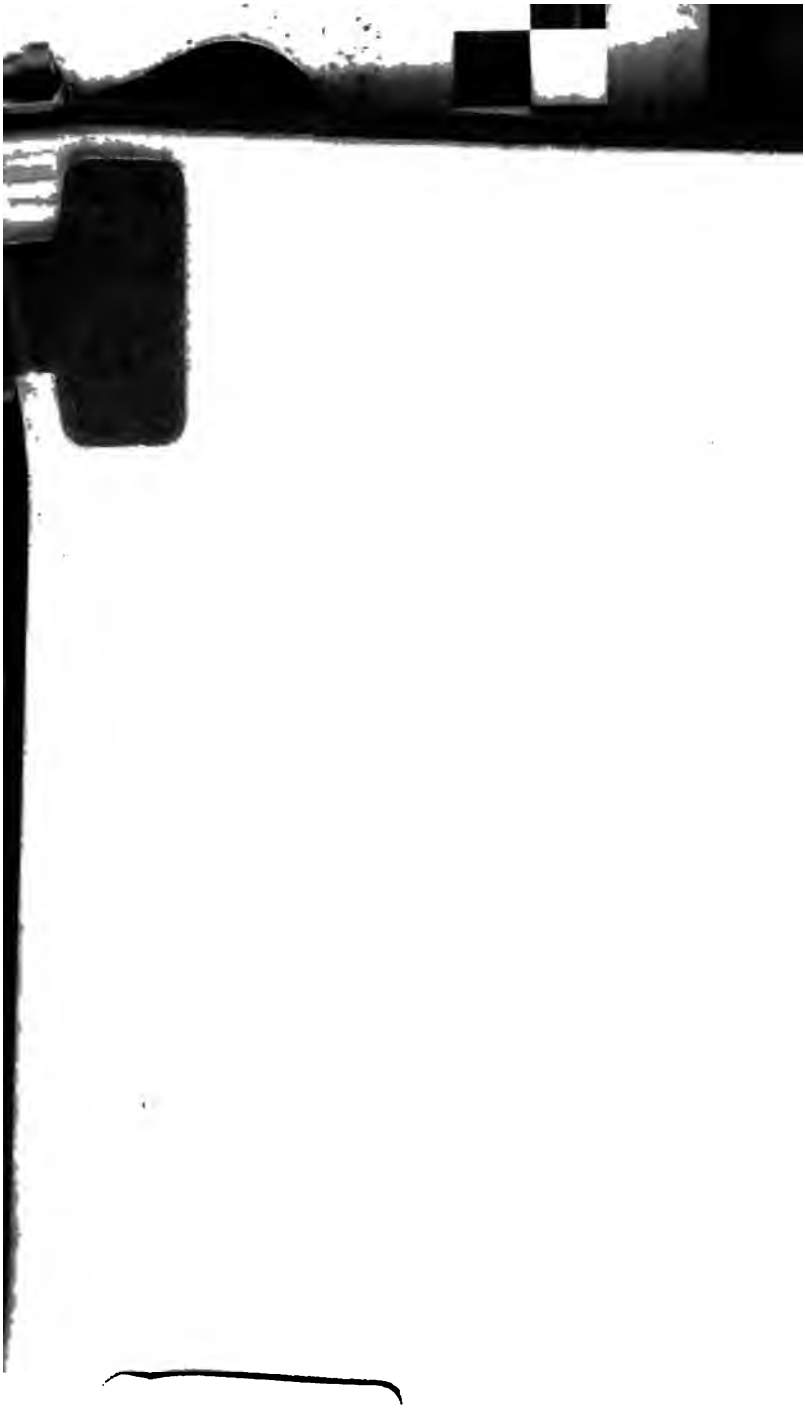
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JUDGE LYNCH

A TALE

OF

THE CALIFORNIA VINEYARDS

BY

GEORGE H. JESSOP

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I DESIRE to acknowledge here my indebtedness to MR. BRANDER MATTHEWS, who has permitted me to use in this tale the characters and incidents of a play written by us in collaboration.

G. H. J.

NEW YORK: *April* 1889.



JUDGE LYNCH

CHAPTER I

THERE was a puzzled, grieved expression on the Sheriff's face as he stepped forward and laid his hand on the young man's shoulder.

'Jack Scott, you are my prisoner!'

Jack started and shivered a little. Arrest on a charge of murder is fortunately a rare experience and of a kind to shock the strongest nerves. But arrest at this time and place meant something worse than suspicion, confinement, and the long suspense of a trial. The young man knew this, and his mind grasped in a moment the whole significance of the situation, with the lightning speed of thought in moments of mortal peril.

For this isolated little community of San



Pablo, forty miles from railroad or telegraph, cut off by the precipitous coast range from the rest of California—even from the rest of its own county—was a law unto itself. The village nestled in a narrow plain, on one side the broad Pacific, on the other the mountains clothed on their western slope with the clustered vines. A peaceful settlement, to all appearance; and yet robbery, violence, murder itself had stained San Pablo's records. Since Mr. Byrne's vineyard gang—Italian labourers mostly—had struck, the place had been in confusion. Quarrels, assaults, bloodshed had become matters of nightly occurrence. Sheriff Starkweather had come over from San Antonio and had taken up his residence temporarily at the San Pablo House, but even his presence seemed to have little effect on the lawless element. And then the citizens of San Pablo had met; they had discussed the situation, and arrived at a conclusion. The laws should be administered by committee of themselves, and all infraction thereof should be visited with the same punishment—death! It was hard measure for p offenders, and yet the men could scarce blamed for adopting it. Riot and assassi

had disfigured their town; the crowd of swarthy loafers who hung around its plaza and its bar-rooms were little better than banditti, living on plunder and making small account of human life. In local phrase, San Pablo was 'a bad place to bluff.' San Pablo refused to be bluffed. San Pablo, in an emergency, could hold life as cheaply as the worst 'dago' that ever hoed a vine, and the next man that committed a crime —be the offender who he might—should swing for it.

All this Jack Scott knew. He had been present at the meeting of the Vigilance Committee and had even ventured to preach moderation—not that he altogether blamed the exasperation of the other men, but he was a popular young fellow and highly esteemed in the place, and he had felt it to be his duty to use such influence as he possessed in behalf of law and order. As he expected, his protest went for nothing. He found no support. Mr. Byrne sided with him at first, but soon withdrew when he found he was championing a hopeless cause. The Hon. Pat Byrne was too good a politician to vote with the minority.

And the committee had proved itself in

deadly earnest. When Juan Estudillo, having taken a glass too much, had started in, revolver in hand, to clean out the office of the 'Independent,' Judge Boone, Tom Smith, and half a dozen others had acted promptly. Estudillo was seized before he could fire a shot; his explanation of his difficulty with Field, the editor, was not even listened to, and the poor Mexican was ridden out of town on a rail. Only Jack Scott's prompt intercession saved him from the additional discomfort of a coat of tar and feathers. Juan was forced to back his wooden steed all the way to his ranch—three miles up the valley, and he had been left at his own door with an emphatic caution that if he dared to show his face in San Pablo for six months, worse was in store for him. Evidently the Vigilance Committee meant business.

Jack reviewed the situation as Sheriff Starkweather's heavy hand fell on his shoulder —a hand that had never before been put forth to him save in the friendly spirit of hearty greeting. His face paled a little, but he only drew back a step and bowed his head in acknowledgment of the official authority. Then, as he raised his eyes, he saw that the group

around him was growing every moment, and he caught the flutter of pretty summer dresses as two ladies came on through the trees and paused in wonder at the unwonted gathering. A crimson flush rose to the young man's pale cheeks, and he looked down again. It was hard that she should see him like this.

Lucy Starkweather was a handsome girl, tall, dark-haired, dark-eyed, with a certain queenliness about her that even the rough vineyard men and rancheros recognised. Jack had recognised it long since, and perhaps, but for it, he would have put in words the admiration with which the dark eyes and bright face inspired him. Her friends in San Antonio called her Lady Lucy, and Jack Scott, with the winning diffidence of a young man in love, thought that no one was worthy of her—himself least of all. And now she saw him arrested—arrested by her own father! Jack noticed her start of astonishment as she turned and said something to her companion. He knew her too—this pretty, fair-haired girl; Lucy had introduced him to her. She was a Miss Carrie Van Zandt, an Eastern young lady who had been educated at the same school in New York as Miss Lucy had attended;

and he stood, arrested for a brutal crime, under the eyes of those two high-bred girls! It was all very hard to bear.

The Hon. Pat Byrne saw the ladies coming, and detached himself from the group to meet them. Now they would hear it all. Jack strained his ears to try and catch the conversation, but the girls had stopped too far off. He saw Mr. Byrne remove his tall hat—the only tall hat in San Antonio county—and make a sweeping bow as he approached them. Then the Sheriff spoke to his prisoner.

'You can sit down, Jack, if you want,' he said, kindly. 'I must stay till they get back up the gully with Dick.'

'Sam Starkweather,' exclaimed Jack, facing round on him, 'do you believe that I shot Dick Morley?'

'No,' answered the Sheriff, 'I don't; but that's neither here nor there. With the proof that's in my hand, it's my duty to arrest you, and I've done it.'

Jack said no more. He stepped forward at Mr. Starkweather's side, and peered into the gully. The ground was rocky and broken. It was part of a deep ravine that cut into the

coast range; and along it, and at the spot where it opened into the plain half a mile below, straggled the village of San Pablo. The only level piece of ground in the neighbourhood was that on which they were standing—a little plateau of barely an acre in extent covered thickly with red dust, as was the road which led from the town past it, through the ravine and over the mountains towards San Antonio. The month was September, but no rain had fallen yet, and all nature was parched and dry after the long summer. A single house was in sight, built on the little plain—a kind of general store, kept by the man whose fate all San Pablo was now investigating. Just behind the house there was an immense rock—partly earth-covered and overgrown with climbing plants, but bare and flat above. It was on top of this that Morley had last been seen alive. The rock overhung the gully, and from its summit there was a sheer drop of one hundred feet or more into the abyss below. From the level spot on which the men were gathered, however, the descent was much easier and the depth was not so great. This gorge was to the right of the San Pablo road, and continued close to it till

the church was reached—a primitive wooden structure which marked the limits of the village proper, a quarter of a mile below. Beyond the little clearing on which Morley's house stood the trees grew thickly, and the course of the road could not be traced more than a few yards in either direction. The church, and the village which straggled on beyond, were of course invisible, but the rapid fall of the ravine showed that it would soon reach the level of the gully which made this portion of the track dangerous even for the little waggons of the place. In fact, about a quarter of a mile lower down, the valley spread out and showed few inequalities. But at the spot on which the men were looking down, the gorge, clothed by climbing plants and overgrown with brushwood, looked deep and dismal enough.

The news had reached the village, and people were coming up every moment. They came by twos and threes and single—store-keepers, labourers, bar-room loafers, and each, after a rapid question or two, pressed forward and looked into the ravine. Some of them climbed down the steep banks and joined those below. The latter were hidden in the tangle of

underbush, but the movement of the stems and the rustle of the parched leaves showed that the search was over, and that the dead man—he could but be dead after such a fall—was being carried up to the plateau.

Jack leaned over and gazed down among the waving branches. The Sheriff, with one hand resting on the young man's arm, seemed to be holding him back from the dangerous brink; but Jack knew that the touch meant the jailer's grasp on the prisoner.

And the two girls stood with Mr. Byrne near the edge of the clearing with parted lips and straining eyes—watching.

'Are you sure, Mr. Byrne?' asked Carrie Van Zandt. 'Has Colonel Morley certainly been—' she broke off as if her lips refused to syllable the awful word, murder.

'It's sorry I am to say it,' answered Byrne, 'but there can't be no manner o' doubt o' it. Mrs. Morley heerd the shot with her own ears, and run out in time to see the poor fellow whirling down off o' his rock like a broken-winged crow.'

'Poor woman!' murmured Carrie.

'An' Judge Boon an' Mr. Field, that had

passed, as it might be, two minutes afore, come runnin' back to the report—oh, it was a cruel murder, not a doubt o' it.'

'And why have they fastened the crime on Mr. Scott?'

Lucy had made one or two attempts to speak before she brought out this question, but it came from her lips now, hard and clear as steel, and without a tremor of the voice or a shade of expression in the tone. It was so unlike Lucy's usual utterance that Byrne looked from one of the girls to the other as if uncertain which had spoken.

'Well,' he said hesitatingly, 'there was a many little things pointin' towards Jack. He was on the spot where the shot come from—his pistol was found lyin' close by; he'd been in high words with poor Dick not more'n five minutes before—oh, I've no manner o' doubt Jack had nothin' to do wid it. He's not that kind o' man. But sarcumstances bein' as it were corroborative evidence, if I may say so—in coorse they tuk him into custody on the spur o' the moment—not but what he'll establish his innocency aisy enough.'

Lucy stood looking at the ground as if in

deep thought. Suddenly she turned and raised her great dark eyes to Mr. Byrne's face—'May I never ate another bit if they weren't burnin' like two coals o' fire,' that gentleman stated when he came to speak of the scene.

'Mr. Byrne,' she said earnestly, 'Mr. Scott has been in your employment ever since he came here—you owe it to him—you owe it to yourself, you owe it to all his friends to stand by him in this trouble, and help him to clear his name of this odious suspicion.'

Byrne looked somewhat taken aback. 'Surely, surely, Miss Lucy,' he replied, 'I've a great wish for Jack, an' I'll do me utmost.'

Carrie Van Zandt clutched Lucy's arm.

'Oh, see, see, Lucy,' she cried. 'They have found the body and are bringing it up here. Oh, do, do, please come away.'

Lucy hesitated a moment. 'I don't like to seem to turn my back on my friends when they are in difficulty,' she said.

'Ye'd better go, Miss Lucy. Sure your pa's there, an' he wouldn't like to have you round.'

I shall certaintly faint if I see a dead man,

so choose,' added Carrie, dragging on her friend's arm.

While Lucy still hesitated, a figure detached itself from the curious group gathered on the plateau, and came swiftly towards them. He was a tall, spare man, shabbily dressed in clothes of a semi-clerical cut, and he walked with rapid, nervous steps. He had narrow, stooping shoulders, and white hands and a very pale face —the face of a visionary—an ascetic, framed in whiskers of a lustreless black and lit up by dark, deeply sunken eyes. In the robust, open-air, unimaginative life of San Pablo, such a man seemed strangely out of place. Neither in dress, nor appearance, nor habits of thought would he seem to have anything in common with his surroundings. And yet he was popular, in a certain way; respected, too, though many people called him a 'crank,' for he was the schoolmaster, and the most efficient man who had ever held that office in San Pablo.

Byrne hailed him as he approached. 'Poor Dick's dead, av coorse, Mr. Jeffries?'

Jeffries joined the little group, lifting his hat to the ladies as he did so.

'I suppose there cannot be a doubt of it,

Mr. Byrne,' he said, 'but I didn't wait to see. You know I can't bear the sight of blood—and a death by violence!' he broke off with a shudder and his face seemed to take on an added shade of pallor. 'Shall we go on, ladies?' he resumed after a moment.

'Ay, do, young ladies,' urged Byrne. 'Mr. Jeffries will see yez down to the hotel, an' I'll stay on the spot, an' if there is anything I can do, sure I'll spind me day doin' it.'

This time Lucy made no objection. She followed the schoolmaster and Carrie down the steep track, while the Hon. Pat Byrne joined the group that bore to his home the mangled remains of Dick Morley.

CHAPTER II

As the melancholy procession moved towards the little store, many eyes were fixed on Kate Morley, the widow of the murdered man. She had been the first to rush down the ravine when the ringing report of the pistol had called her from the piazza in time to witness her husband's death. Now she returned, walking behind the men who carried his dead body. Her gown of coarse blue calico had been torn here and there by thorny shrubs, her magnificent auburn hair had become dishevelled in her haste, and hung over her shoulders; the exertion of climbing from the ravine had brought a bright colour into her cheeks; her complexion was one of Mrs. Morley's chief beauties. She looked handsome, and though she was silent and kept her eyes bent on the ground, she had not the aspect of a mourner.

Hank Dollett, of the livery stable, dropped behind and made a remark to that effect; but he spoke in a low tone, for the afternoon's tragedy had dashed San Pablo's usual spirits.

Tom Smith answered him, and the reply showed the reputation the deceased had left behind him in the community where he had lived for twelve years.

'"Twouldn't be in human nature for anyone to be particular cut up because Drunken Dick passed in his checks, an', as for his wife, it's a good riddance for her, I should say.'

'Ay, but it's kinder rough on her all the same,' answered Hank. 'A man's a man even if he never drew a sober breath. What's the poor woman goin' to do now, I'd like to know?'

'She'll worry along all right,' was the reply. 'There's a many that 'ud help her now that wouldn't 'a looked the same side of the street with her while she was tied to that sot.'

At the same moment all that was mortal of 'that sot' was carried into the house he had left scarce an hour before with all the life that years of dissipation had spared him.

A bright-eyed, eager boy came out, and ran to Mr. Byrne.

'Oh, Pop,' he cried, 'you wouldn't never know him—he's all scratched and tore to pieces, an' awful white in the face considerin' it's Dick Morley.'

Mr. Byrne turned on the boy indignantly. 'An' what call have ye, Pat Byrne, to be lingerin' round an' takin' art or part in the like? Go home wid ye, an' larn yer lesson.'

'There's no school to-morrow, Pop, it's a holiday, an' I tell you this here is exciting,' remonstrated the boy.

'Go home now and do as I bid ye,' said Mr. Byrne severely. The youngster withdrew, but paused as soon as he was out of his father's sight and hung round the edge of the group waiting to see what would happen next.

But the excitement was nearly over. Judge Boone and the other men who had carried up the body trooped out of the house, their heavy boots clattering on the wooden steps of the verandah. The Judge closed the door as he came out, but seeing Kate Morley outside he opened it again and held it for her to enter. She did not seem to notice the attention, but stood leaning against the wall silent, with downcast eyes.

'Where's the doctor?' asked Mr. Field, as if he had just thought of something.

'The doctor's up to Orvita's ranch and can't be back much before midnight,' answered Boone. 'But what do we want of a doctor? To tell us the man's dead? I can tell you that much myself.'

'Still it would be more regular,' persisted Field.

He was the editor of the local paper, a sharp, shrewd, meddlesome little man from Connecticut. His close-set grey eyes and fluffy, straggling red whiskers, combined with an alert, inquisitive manner, involuntarily reminded people of a terrier. To this apt adjustment of manner and appearance he owed his universal nick-name, 'Foxy Field.'

'Well, Jack,' said the Sheriff rousing himself, 'come along; I can't let you out of my sight till I lodge you in San Antonio Jail, and that'll be to-morrow morning, bright and early.'

Judge Boone linked his arm in Field's and drew him over to a little group of men, Hank Dollett, Smith, and a few others, who stood apart conversing in low tones.

Kate Morley looked up suddenly: the babble

of comment and conversation around her had seemingly passed her by, but the Sheriff's deep voice awakened and commanded her attention.

'What's that, Mr. Starkweather?' she asked, coming a few steps forward.

'Nothing, nothing, Mrs. Morley,' answered the Sheriff kindly. 'Dear heart, how wild you look! Won't you go in and—and rest? It'll be lonesome for you, I suppose, too, but—tell you what; you go in and lie down for an hour and I'll send my daughter Lucy to sit with you as soon as I get down to the hotel.'

'What's that?' she persisted. 'What were you saying to Mr. Scott about jail? For Heaven's sake, man,' she went on, raising her voice as the Sheriff did not reply, 'you don't suspect him of——' She pointed to the house with an eloquent gesture which completed her meaning better than words.

'I believe they do, Mrs. Morley,' said Jack; 'and it can't be denied that there are a good many ugly looking facts to be explained. There's one point you can help me in. You must have known that poor Dick had my pistol yesterday.'

'Had he?' inquired Kate; 'I don't know.

He never tells—I mean he never told me anything.' Then, noticing Jack's look of disappointment, she hastened to add: 'I know he had a pistol—he was fussing over the lock of one all the morning.'

'See, Mrs. Morley,' said Starkweather. 'You know Jack Scott, and I know him, and we neither of us believe that it lies inside of his skin to commit a cowardly murder like that. All it wants is a few days to clear up things, for it can't be denied—as he says himself—that there are queer circumstances. Look at here! Jack here and Dick Morley had high words——'

'My poor husband was always quarrelling with everybody,' interrupted the widow.

'You're right, he was; but this was an especial peppery quarrel, for Foxy Field and Judge Boone heard it. They heard it and saw Jack enter the chaparral by the path under the live oak yonder. And out of that very path, not two minutes after, comes a shot that picks the old man off the rock where he was lounging, and tumbles him head first down the gully.'

'I heard it, I heard it,' groaned Kate, 'and I saw——' She broke off and hid her face in her hands.

'Of course you saw. And right around the very spot where the shot came from, Hank Dollett picks up a pistol which Jack Scott acknowledges for his own.'

'That is true,' said Scott. 'It is my pistol, and I don't believe there's another like it in San Antonio county.'

'So there you see, ma'am,' went on the Sheriff, spreading out the fingers of one hand and ticking off the evidence, point by point, with the other. 'There's the quarrelling, there's the shot, there's the point it come from; there's the fact that no one else is seen in that direction—and there's the pistol, the biggest point of all.'

There was a moment's pause, and the voices of the men, a dozen paces off, came across the clearing. Jack glanced towards them, and saw the tall stooping figure of Haman Jeffries, the schoolmaster. He had joined the group and was listening to their remarks, though apparently taking no active part in the conversation. Jack stepped eagerly forward.

'There's Mr. Jeffries at last,' he exclaimed. 'Now we'll see.'

'Gently, my boy, gently,' said the Sheriff,

laying his hand on the young man's arm. 'You and I must travel together for the present.'

Jack hung his head and coloured deeply. He was beginning to realise what captivity meant.

Kate Morley, with quick womanly sympathy, caught Jack's hand in both of hers.

'I don't care what proof they have; I don't care what they say; I'll never believe that you killed Dick unless it was by accident.'

'Thank you, Mrs. Morley,' said Jack; 'but I am innocent of his death. I never fired that shot; and I think I can break one link in the cursed chain that connects me with the crime, right here and now.'

Then he raised his voice and called aloud, 'Mr. Jeffries, Mr. Jeffries!'

The schoolmaster started and came forward. He uncovered to the widow in her torn gown with the same deference he had shown towards Miss Starkweather and her New York friend. Mrs. Morley turned away as if to avoid him, but Haman Jefferies did not seem offended. In spite of his strange appearance he was evidently a gentleman by breeding, and made all allowance

for the poor woman in the hour of her sudden bereavement.

'Can I do anything for you, Mr. Scott?' he asked. His manner was pleasant, and he had a good address.

As Mr. Bryne had remarked when the man first came to San Pablo, 'When ye've got used to looking at Ham Jeffries ye've got over the worst of him. He's a good-hearted poor divil an' pleasant to talk to, but he's a mortial homely man, savin' your presence.'

'Mr. Jeffries,' said Scott, 'I have been arrested for the murder of Richard Morley.'

The schoolmaster inclined his head. 'So I have heard, Mr. Scott, and I have heard it with pain. Allow me to hope that your innocence may be speedily established.'

'I am in hopes that you may help me to do that,' continued Jack; and his heart beat quicker as he realised how momentous was the question he was about to ask. After all, old Dick Morley had been a notorious liar, and if what he had told Scott—a short half hour before his death— should prove to be untrue, the young man's case would be black indeed.

Boone, Dollett, Smith, Field, and half a dozen

more followed Jeffries as he came forward. Mr. Byrne had discovered his son still on the ground, feasting full on horrors, and had led him home by the ear. Starkweather still kept his hand on Jack's shoulder.

'Did Dick Morley give you a pistol to return to me?' asked Jack.

Jeffries looked surprised. 'No,' he answered; 'what should he have done that for?'

Jack's heart sank, but he did not despair. 'I left a pistol with Dick to have the lock made easier. I called for it to-day and he told me he had given it to Haman Jeffries to return to me.'

Kate Morley stepped forward and faced the schoolmaster.

'Speak the truth now, Haman Jefferies, as in the sight of heaven,' she said.

Jeffries' voice had a caressing tone as he answered Kate. 'I was brought up to speak the truth, Mrs. Morley,' he responded. Then he turned to Jack. 'Colonel Morley said nothing to me about a pistol.'

'At least he told me he did,' said Jack, profoundly discouraged.

'And your only witness is the man you have just shot,' remarked Field with a sneer.

'Mr. Field,' cried the Sheriff sternly, 'this man has been arrested on suspicion. I will thank you not to prejudge the case.'

Mrs. Morley stood looking fixedly at Jeffries as he pronounced the words that seemed to shatter Jack's last hope. Then the colour faded out of her cheeks; she covered her face with her hands, and sank on her knees.

'Poor creature!' murmured Jeffries in a tone of deep pity.

'God help the widow,' said Judge Boone solemnly. Then he turned fiercely on the prisoner. 'Look at your work there, Jack Scott,' he said.

'Silence!' shouted the Sheriff. 'Scott, come with me,' and, linking his arm in that of the young man, he drew him off down the steep track towards the village.

The men watched the pair till the chaparral hid them from view. Then they exchanged glances, and a few whispered words passed from one to the other.

'There can't be a doubt of it,' said Smith.

'No doubt at all,' echoed Field; 'we're all decided, gentlemen?'

Then there was another moment of rapid



whispering, during which Jeffries attempted to raise Kate Morley to her feet. She sprang up, and, shaking him off with a gesture of repulsion, went towards the house. Jeffries turned back to the group with a touch of impatience in his manner and a faint colour in his cheek.

He reached the others just as Judge Boone said in a low voice, 'Then, gentlemen, it's all settled. The Committee of Safety will meet to-night.'

CHAPTER III

JACK SCOTT was born in the city of New York some twenty-eight years before the day he was arrested for Colonel Morley's murder. When quite a young man he drifted out to the Pacific Coast, attracted, like many others, by the large rewards and fine business opportunities San Francisco was supposed to offer. Like many others he was disappointed, and soon found himself forced to turn his hand to anything that presented itself, without reference to his original intentions. In San Francisco you shall meet clergymen who are book-keepers, book-keepers who are doctors, doctors who are teamsters, and a fair sprinkling of the liberal professions ringing up fares on the street cars. So it was neither unusual nor surprising that Jack Scott, bred at the desk of a New York merchant, should go about picking up local items for a morning paper. Indeed, the young man was

fortunate to find employment in this direction, and he often felicitated himself, and thanked Mr. James Ruggles for the position, uncongenial as it was.

Mr. James Ruggles—better known as Jimmy Ruggles—was at that time City editor of the 'Morning Summons.' Jack and he had been school friends and near neighbours in New York, but while Jimmy had adopted journalism as a profession, Jack had merely drifted into it from force of circumstances. It was a living for the moment to Scott; it was a livelihood and a future to Ruggles. The one was always seeking to get on in it, the other was as earnestly anxious to get out of it.

Jack's opportunity came at last. Chance brought him in the way of Mr. Byrne. The Hon. Pat had come to San Francisco in furtherance of one of the many schemes which made him the busiest man in Southern California. For some time he had been turning over the idea of starting a weekly paper in San Antonio county, an idea which eventually took shape in the San Pablo 'Independent,' and, meeting Scott, Mr. Byrne fancied that he had found the editor he was seeking. Business details were soon

arranged; a hearty good-bye and God-speed from Jimmy Ruggles constituted Jack's hardest parting, and he accompanied the Hon. Pat down the coast to San Pablo.

Jack was content and happy in his new life. The country was strange to him; the people were interesting—at least some of them were, and it is within every one's experience that even one person may shed a brightness over any place and period. The one person who in Jack's case was endowed with this magical power was Miss Lucy Starkweather. It was true that her home was in San Antonio, eighteen long miles away over the mountains; but distances are not too closely reckoned in Southern California.

The young lady sometimes accompanied her father to San Pablo. Jack Scott often found, or invented, excuses to go to San Antonio, and, though no word of love had ever passed between the two young people, a very pleasant friendship grew out of their frequent meetings.

Nearly a year elapsed after Jack Scott's arrival in San Pablo before the 'Independent' was started, and when the paper did appear the young man was not its editor. He had found a far more congenial position, and one which

suited him better in every way. On his arrival, having much leisure time on his hands, and feeling that he owed something to Pat Byrne, who had paid him salary from the day they left San Francisco, Jack had gone over the books and accounts of the Hon. Pat's multifarious business. He found a strange jumble. Vineyard items were mixed up with the receipts from the Spread Eagle Sample Room, and rents and transactions in real estate figured among the profits of the local livery stable. With the method of a trained book-keeper, Jack went to work to straighten out the tangle, and the result of a few weeks' industry was a revelation to Mr. Byrne. That gentleman, by the aid of a prodigious memory, and certain simple and elementary aids thereto, had contrived to transact his many-sided business without serious loss or inconvenience. Perhaps, too, the luck that had aided him in accumulating his fortune stood to him still, and enabled him to preserve and add to it; but though a man of little or no education, his native shrewdness and ability—and he possessed a good deal of both—showed him the value of the system Jack had introduced into his affairs.

All question of the 'Independent' was at once dropped. Jack Scott was engaged at a largely increased salary as Mr. Byrne's book-keeper and general manager, and when the paper did eventually appear some months later, it was under the charge of Mr. Field, who had been engaged in San Francisco to edit it.

Jack had brought with him one letter of introduction; not that he needed it, for Mr Byrne, of course, knew everybody; but Jimmy Ruggles had written and offered the letter, and Jack had naturally accepted it, and in due course had presented it. Colonel Morley and Jimmy Ruggles were first cousins; the Colonel was several years Jimmy's senior, and the two had met but once or twice in their lives. Probably, had Ruggles known his cousin a little better, he would have endeavoured to ignore the relationship altogether. He would scarcely have emphasised it by a letter of introduction, for Richard Morley was not a relative to be proud of.

In the first place, his title of Colonel was purely mythical. He had served in the early part of the war, certainly, and still drew his pension for wounds received at that period, but

it is doubtful if he ever attained any military rank—certainly he never reached the grade of Colonel. He described himself as having been mustered out, sometimes as Captain, sometimes as Brigadier-General, sometimes as anything intermediate. Below the former he never sank; beyond the latter he never rose, and the rank assumed was, to those who knew him, a fair gauge of the man's degree of intoxication at the moment.

Morley was a slave to liquor, and, even in a community most charitable towards that failing, he had earned the name of Drunken Dick. He had sunk lower and lower in the scale each year, and was only saved from utter destitution and reprobation by his wife.

Kate Morley's conduct in the exceptionally trying circumstances in which she found herself excited every one's admiration. She rarely uttered a complaint; she worked hard, and endured her lot in silence. The proceeds of the little general store, which was at once her home and her livelihood, served to keep a roof over her head. Dick, who was naturally of a handy mechanical turn, sometimes earned a dollar or two by repairing a tool, or a machine, or a fire-



arm which was out of order; but of course he could only work in his sober moments, and they were infrequent. The little he received, however, as well as the amount of his pension, went for liquor. No penny ever passed from Dick Morley to his wife.

People wondered sometimes how a handsome, spirited young woman like Kate Morley had ever come to marry such a man as Dick; and Pat Byrne, who was neither diffident nor delicate, put the question to her in so many words.

'I dunno how it is, Mrs. Morley,' he said, 'that a fine lump of a girl like yourself—no offence in life, ma'am, but sure it's the truth, an' yer glass 'ud tell ye if I didn't—I dunno at all how the divil—savin' yer presence—ye ever come to marry an ould soak like Drunken Dick.'

'He was not always Drunken Dick, Mr. Byrne,' Kate answered with a heavy sigh. 'When I met him he was a dashing young soldier. I was a nurse in the hospital, you know, and it was when he was wounded and weak that I knew him first. I nursed him bac' to life, and I suppose he took a fancy to me—and I was interested in him, and——'

'An' ye married him. That's about the size of it. Well, well, well, it should be a warnin' to all of us.'

Byrne fixed his eyes mechanically on the form of Dick Morley, who was lying half asleep on a chair on the verandah of his house. It was early in the afternoon of Dick Morley's last day on earth, and if Mr. Byrne could have looked a few hours into the future no doubt his eyes would have had a different expression. As it was, however, they showed nothing but a mingling of pity and disgust—the only emotions which a creature like Drunken Dick seemed capable of inspiring.

'Ay, an' ye loved him once I darsay. It's a quare world, a quare world!' said Byrne meditatively.

As he spoke Morley sprung to his feet, clawing at the air and lunging wildly as if at some invisible foe.

'Ah, ha! Ye whelp! Ye will, will ye? Take that! Ye'll carry that mark to your grave!'

'What's the matter wid the man? Is it dramin' ye are?' cried Byrne, startled, for once, into rapid utterance.

Dick rubbed his eyes and looked round him. 'Ay, it's a dream, I suppose,' he explained. 'I thought I was down on the beach again, and that fellow went for me——'

'Who went for you?' interrupted Byrne.

'How the blazes do ye suppose I know when it was as dark as a wolf's mouth?' snarled the other.

'What is he talkin' about?' asked Byrne, appealing to Mrs. Morley.

'Haven't you heard?' answered Kate. 'Richard has been telling the story to every one. It seems last night he was coming home along the beach——'

'Wid an iligant jag on him, I'll be bound, muttered Byrne parenthetically.

'When someone attacked him. It was dark, and the assassin missed the first blow——'

'Ay, but I didn't miss mine,' interjected Dick boastfully. 'I had my knife handy and I just sliced into him.'

'Didn't ye drame it, Dick?' asked Byrne, laughing.

The other cursed volubly for a few minutes.

'He'll wish I'd dreamed it,' said he, 'but he'll find it's no joke. I'll bet I ripped up a foot of

his arm—the cowardly dago! I'll tell ye how it was, Mr. Byrne——'

'No, don't, Dick,' interrupted Byrne. 'Wait till you've time to get drunk over it again, and broider up the daytails a bit. Only last night, was it? Wait a week, and it'll be an army ye've whipped.'

'Yes, you may sneer,' muttered Morley sullenly; 'but we'll see what the Committee of Safety has to say to it.'

'Is the mail distributed, Mr. Byrne?' inquired Kate.

'Yes, the carrier from San Antonio come in an hour ago,' answered Byrne. 'I had a letther from me agint in 'Frisco. He can get no labourers to come down into these parts by rason of the strike, an' the disturbance an' bloodshed, that have characterised the town.'

'The Committee of Safety will soon put that right,' remarked Morley.

'Maybe it will, Dick, an' maybe it won't,' said Byrne, in his usual deliberate manner. 'But meanwhile me grapes is rottin', an' the rain is comin', an' them dagoes are more onrayson-able than a pack of nagers.'

Thus grumbling, Mr. Byrne shook up his

norse and cantered off along the San Antonio road. A little further on, a narrow track which tended southward among the foothills furnished a short cut to his vineyard.

At the same moment a spare, ungainly figure, clad in rusty black, appeared from the direction of San Pablo. At sight of it, Kate Morley turned abruptly and entered the house. Haman Jeffries came forward and joined Dick upon the verandah.

CHAPTER IV

THE schoolmaster was a frequent visitor at the Morleys', but as a rule by no means welcome. Dick Morley was sullen and cross-grained, and appreciated no caller who did not bring whiskey in his pocket, and Haman was the one unswerving teetotaller of whom San Pablo could boast.

As for Kate, the sense of degradation with which her husband's infirmity filled her, made her shrink from society, and she avoided every one as much as possible. Jack Scott, perhaps, was an exception. He had early seen how matters stood in the Morley household, and by a chivalrous avoidance of the disagreeable topic, or by a light-hearted, off-hand way he had of finding excuses when Dick became too obvious, he had won greatly on Mrs. Morley's regard. For Jeffries, however, she had a profound dislike —a dislike that bordered on disgust—a disgust

that had in it a tinge of horror. It would have been difficult for Kate to analyse the feelings with which she regarded him. The truth probably was that she was a warm-blooded, passionate woman—full of life, while he was a gloomy mystic, eaten up with morbid self-imaginings and uncouth superstitions. He seemed to enjoy Kate's society, however, whenever he could surprise her into bestowing it upon him, and used to torment the poor woman by relating to her his fantastic dreams, and preaching his favourite doctrine of blind fatalism.

Colonel Morley regarded Jeffries and Jack Scott with an impartial hatred. Drunken Dick had once loved his handsome wife, and in the dim recesses of his liquor-steeped brain still smouldered a spark of jealousy. He did not like any one to notice Kate. He saw that Jeffries often sought her society; he fancied, when she chanced to meet Jack Scott, that he could detect in her manner a trace of the liveliness and spirit he had admired in her as a girl, and he hated both the men in his heart.

He received the schoolmaster with some touch of civility, however, as the latter crossed the open space and joined him on the verandah.

Dick was a hero in his own eyes at the moment, and was glad to narrate the midnight attack which had been made upon him at the beach, and the energy and courage with which he repelled it. This he did in a loud boastful tone and with many oaths, while Jeffries listened, politely indeed, but with the doubtful smile and air of mental reservation with which most statements of Dick Morley's were apt to be received. Dick noticed his manner.

'You don't believe me, I suppose?' he asked.

'Why should I doubt you, Colonel Morley?' returned the other.

'I don't know why you should, except because your liver is as white as your face, and you don't know a man when you see one. Do you know what this is?' Dick went on, pulling a revolver from his pocket.

'Of course; that is a revolver,' answered Jeffries.

'If I'd had the good luck to have had this little fellow along last night, I'd have filled that —— so full of lead that you might have staked his carcass out for a claim.'

Jeffries shuddered a little and drew back. Then, as if overcoming a weakness he was

ashamed of, he leaned forward and took the revolver.

'If you're going down towards the village,' added Dick, 'you might take it with you. It'l save the owner a walk up here after it, and save me from the pleasure of seeing him round here —which I don't hanker after.'

'I'll leave it with pleasure,' assented Jeffries. 'Whose is it?'

'It's Jack Scott's, and I've made a good job of it for him, too. The lock was rusted clean through, but I've fixed it, I guess. Byrne was here a while ago and I might have given it to him, but I didn't think of it.'

'I'll leave it with the bar-tender at the Spread Eagle, if I don't see Mr. Scott,' said Jeffries. He handled the pistol cautiously, as if the touch of such a weapon was unfamiliar to him, and Dick laughed at his terror.

'You're not much used to these tools, I take it?' he observed.

'No,' answered Jeffries. 'It isn't loaded, is it?'

'Yes, it's loaded. It was when I got it, an' I ain't stealing any one's cartridges—least of all, any that belong to the Hero of San Pablo.'

This was a title that local acclaim had fastened on Jack Scott, in consequence of his daring conduct one stormy night, the preceding March. A vessel had gone ashore on the Dead Man's Reef, about a mile above San Pablo, and Jack, at the imminent risk of his life, had succeeded in taking a line to the doomed ship. By this means communication had been established with the shore and all hands saved. The young man's gallant conduct had been recognised by the rescued people with a medal, and by his fellow-townsmen with three ringing cheers, and the title, 'The Hero of San Pablo.'

But the schoolmaster was not a man to recognise distinctions, or to defer to the 'bit of purple' wherein humanity is so ready to wrap a brave deed.

'Colonel Morley,' he said, 'every man's life is appointed for him beforehand. Death will come when it is to come, without reference to the risks we run or the care we take of ourselves. I acknowledge no heroes.'

'No,' returned Dick; 'if it's all fixed that a man's to be hanged he'll never be drowned. That'll keep your head above water.'

Jeffries made no reply, but sat turning the

pistol in his hand. Morley watched him for a moment, and then resumed:

'You'll cheat the hangman if you monkey with that tool that way.'

Jeffries hastily thrust the revolver into his pocket. 'I have had little experience with deadly weapons,' he said.

'Never laid out your man, I suppose?' Dick queried.

'No!' answered the other horrified; 'have you?'

'I've been in the war and have done my share of shooting,' Dick replied.

Jeffries was manifestly disturbed. 'If I killed a man,' he said, 'I should expect to hear his dying moans in every breeze that rustled past me. I should look for his dying face to peer out at me from the waving chaparral——'

'Better let shooting alone if you haven't more grit than that,' interrupted Dick roughly. 'Why, man, do you believe in ghosts?'

'Can any of us say what we believe in and what we disbelieve?' answered the schoolmaster. 'But in any case bloodshed is terrible.'

'You bet it is, when there is a Committee of Safety in working order,' retorted Morley.

Jeffries was evidently nervous under the turn the conversation had taken. He sought to change it.

'How is Mrs. Morley?' he asked.

'Better than she deserves to be,' replied Morley gruffly, 'deserting her husband in this way.'

'Deserting? I don't understand,' said Jeffries. 'Is she going away?'

'She's talking of it. She wants to go to Memphis and nurse yellow fever.'

Jeffries remained silent for a moment, looking toward the house. Morley watched him with an evil grin upon his face.

'She used to be an hospital nurse, I believe,' the schoolmaster said at last.

'Yes,' answered Morley. 'What then? I can't spare her just now.'

'If a human being has but one chance of happiness,' murmured Jeffries, with his eyes still fixed on the door, 'and if there is but a single obstacle on his path upward——' He stopped abruptly and clenched his hand. 'What is crime? Only an evolution of fate.'

'What the devil are you maundering about? D'ye see a ghost now?' asked Dick impatiently.

Jeffries roused himself with a start. 'I beg your pardon, Colonel Morley; I was thinking of other things. I must return to town; good day, sir,' and without a backward glance the schoolmaster moved off across the clearing and was presently lost in the windings of the chaparral.

'Queer snoozer—more'n half mad,' muttered Dick, taking a bottle from his pocket and indulging himself with a long pull at its contents. 'He's no good.'

Kate came out on the verandah. 'Is he gone?' she asked; then, noticing the bottle in her husband's hand, she shook her head in remonstrance. 'Richard, Richard! You know it is a slow poison to you.'

''Taint my fault that it's not quicker,' he said. 'I suppose you wish it was.'

Kate sighed and turned away. Her husband rose and came down the steps.

'That's right,' he grumbled; 'turn your back on me. Never speak a word. Oh, a nice dutiful, companionable wife you are. Go to Memphis and die of fever for all I care. You're doing no good here.'

'I begin to believe so myself,' she responded

wearily. 'Where are you going now?' she added, as he moved off toward the ravine.

'Up on the top of Table Rock, where I can be out of the reach of your clanging, clattering tongue,' answered her husband, going toward the rock, the ascent to which was easy enough from the level on which the cottage stood, though next the gully the face was as precipitous as a cliff.

Kate returned no answer, but seated herself in the verandah with a piece of needlework in her hands.

Dick crossed the clearing, grumbling all the way. He stepped down into the road which he had to cross to reach his favourite loafing-ground, and met Jack Scott, who was walking briskly home from the vineyard, whistling a quick-step, and looking like a man who finds life a pleasant pastime.

'Good day, Colonel,' he said cheerfully as he encountered Morley.

The other looked at him sourly, without replying to the salutation.

'Oh, by the way,' proceeded Jack, 'have you got that pistol of mine yet?'

'Yes, it's done,' growled Morley. 'I gave it

to the schoolmaster to give to you. If he didn't find you he said he'd leave it at the Spread Eagle.'

'All right,' said Jack. 'How much to pay?'

'Call it a dollar,' answered Morley, and the money changed hands.

'Going up for your afternoon's smoke?' asked Jack, as the other climbed the rock and stretched himself luxuriously on the flat surface as if to enjoy every ray of the afternoon sun.

Morley uttered a grunt which might be taken for assent.

'I think I'll say how do you do to Mrs. Morley as I pass,' said Jack, springing up the roadside bank and approaching the house.

Morley seemed anything but pleased at this intimation. He even half rose, as if with the intention of following young Scott, but his laziness prevailed, and he dropped down again with a muttered oath, and lay outlined against the evening sky—a seedy, dilapidated, prematurely aged man.

Meanwhile Jack was leaning his arms on the railing of the verandah and talking to Kate, who had brightened visibly at his approach.

The young man, in common with half the

county, knew what the poor woman had to put up with from her brutalised husband, and pitied her from the bottom of his heart.

'I'm sure the place and—and the surroundings aren't doing you any good,' he was saying. 'They tell me this end of the village isn't very healthy.'

'Thank you, Mr. Scott,' answered Kate, smiling bitterly. 'When I leave San Pablo, it will not be in search of a health resort.'

'I had a letter from Jimmy Ruggles yesterday,' went on Jack. 'He is doing the vineyards for his paper, and will probably take Mr. Byrne's as he passes. He may be here to-day or to-morrow.'

'Yes, he wrote to Richard and said he would look him up,' answered Kate. 'He will find Richard much changed.'

'Do you know, there is a good deal of likeness between those two?' remarked Jack.

'Yes, they were once considered very much alike; but he is so changed,' answered Kate, with an unconscious glance in the direction of her husband, though he was invisible from where she sat.

'I shall be downright glad to see dear old

Jimmy again,' said Jack heartily; 'sha'n't you?'

'I shall scarcely see him unless he comes very soon,' answered Kate quietly.

'Why, do you think of going away?' asked Jack in surprise.

'I have thought of it. Do you suppose you —the people generally, I mean—would be sorry to have me go?'

'I am sure that everybody would regret it,' replied Jack, 'and for myself, I can answer that I would miss you very much.'

'Will you let me ask your advice?' said Kate with suppressed eagerness. 'I have so few I can trust. I am offered a position as hospital nurse at Memphis——'

'At a yellow fever hospital?' interrupted Jack. 'Impossible!'

'Wait! Would you go if you were in my place? Reflect what that place is.'

Jack hesitated. 'It seems to me that I am too young a man to advise you,' he mused.

'You are the only one whose advice I would listen to,' said Kate impetuously; then, controlling herself, she went on more calmly: 'I mean, that you are the only one I have to advise

with. You forget how completely I stand alone.'

Jack felt painfully embarrassed. 'I cannot take the responsibility of advising such a step,' he said slowly. 'Perhaps something may happen to lighten your burden.'

'What can happen to me?' asked Kate desperately.

Jack glanced half unconsciously in Morley's direction as he answered: 'Heaven has its own ways of working deliverance.'

'The days of miracles are past,' cried Kate bitterly. 'No, no, Mr. Scott; I was wrong to ask your advice, for my mind was already made up. I shall go, and I shall say good-bye now.' She came down the verandah steps and offered him her hand.

'Are you going so soon?' asked Jack.

'As soon as possible,' she answered in a low voice. Jack took her hand and held it a moment.

'Good-bye then,' he said gently. 'I have always felt so sorry for you, but I could do so little.'

'You have given me your sympathy, and that is priceless,' said Kate. They had taken a few

steps outward, and were now clear of the house. The little group fell under the eyes of Dick Morley as he lay and smoked.

He started to his feet with a savage oath.

'Here, damn you,' he shouted, addressing his wife, 'are you running after that young galoot before my very eyes? Get back there into the house, where you belong.'

Kate turned without a word and went toward the verandah.

Morley, in a frenzy of passion, continued to hurl abuse after her as long as she remained in sight, shaking his fist and gesticulating like a madman.

Jack could bear it no longer. 'Colonel Morley,' he said, 'you have no right to insult that lady even if she is your wife.'

'Oh, I haven't, have I?' shrieked Dick. 'You're a nice one, you are, to teach me my rights and duties, a high-stomached young whelp like you. I've flogged better men than you in my day.'

Boone and Field chanced to be coming down the vineyard path. They heard Morley's angry voice and grinned with appreciation. 'Drunken Dick's on the war path,' muttered the Judge.

Jack kept his temper and walked down toward the village.

Morley continued to hurl vile epithets after him. When he reached the edge of the chaparral the young man turned and said:

'See here, Dick Morley! You may curse all the world at your own good pleasure, but you'll please weigh your words if you ever address me again, or I'll find a way of stopping that foul tongue of yours.'

'Why, it was Jack Scott he was rowing with,' remarked Field to Boone. 'Come along, Judge, and let's see what the trouble is.'

The two men ran briskly down the road, and reached the clearing. Morley was standing on the Table Rock shaking his fist in impotent rage in the direction of Jack Scott, who was just vanishing among the undergrowth that lined the lower road.

'Damn him,' shouted Dick, 'he's run. That's a nice way to threaten an old soldier with half the settlement between us. If I'd only my gun here——'

He said no more, but broke off abruptly, wildly beating the air on the very edge of the fearful chasm. A pistol shot rang out from the

border of the chaparral, a faint blue smoke curled upward from the spot, and before Field or Boone could take a step forward, before Kate, startled by the report, could reach the road, Dick Morley pitched forward and went crashing down among the underwood a hundred feet below.

CHAPTER V

MISS CARRIE VAN ZANDT sat in her window at the San Pablo house and looked out over the Plaza. Darkness had fallen, but a faint glimmer diffused from stores and saloons showed that the square was crowded with men, and every moment the broad doors of the Spread Eagle, just opposite, swung open and a gush of ruddy light streamed across to the entrance of the hotel. The whole population seemed to be abroad, and the 'dago' element, overawed for once, had slunk into the background. Miss Van Zandt sat in solitude and watched the shifting throng.

The young lady had left New York a few months before to visit relatives in San Francisco. She had keenly enjoyed her first taste of Pacific Coast life, and had been tempted to extend her wanderings as far as San Antonio by the pressing invitation of her school friend, Lucy Starkweather. The capital of San Antonio county

was not an easy place to reach, and a smile flitted across Miss Van Zandt's pretty face as she recalled some of the experiences of her cross-country staging, and how the clever management of a certain young gentleman, a San Francisco acquaintance whom she had met at Orvietas, had smoothed away many a difficulty of the primitive journey. This recollection seemed to lead to a pleasant train of thought, for the girl dwelt on it for some time and the smile lingered in her eyes.

She had not seen much of San Antonio. The day after her arrival, Sheriff Starkweather had been summoned to San Pablo, and had brought his daughter and her guest with him Carrie had accompanied him very willingly. She had heard of the wild, rough life of the Californian coast range, and was glad to have an opportunity to observe it. But her first two days at San Pablo had been rather uneventful, and the tragedy of that afternoon, though exciting enough, had only shocked her. For the first time since she had left New York she was conscious of a little home-sickness.

What could be detaining Lucy? Miss Starkweather had gone to her father as soon as

she had learned that he had reached the hotel, and had been with him ever since. Carrie glanced at her watch. Half an hour and more had she been left alone. Her first impulse was one of impatience; then she rippled out in a little laugh that ended in a sigh. Where the Sheriff was there also would his prisoner be, and Carrie's sharp eyes had already detected Jack Scott's admiration for her school-mate. But the laugh soon merged in the sigh. The young fellow was arrested, charged with this horrible murder, and if there ever had been a chance for a bit of romance in that quarter, the chance had vanished now. It was not that Miss Van Zandt believed Scott guilty of the crime imputed to him. Her brief acquaintance with the young man had taught her that he was a gentleman, and to a girl of Carrie's antecedents this fact alone rendered the accusation absurd. But still it seemed nothing short of impossible that a young lady of her set should marry a man who had been suspected of homicide.

The room had grown very dark, but Miss Van Zandt would not light a candle. She preferred to sit in the window and watch the knots of men forming and dispersing in the Plaza

under her eyes. All the saloons were doing a rushing business. The swinging doors of the Spread Eagle were scarcely closed for a minute at a time. In a general way the crowd seemed to feel the effect of its potations, but none had drank to excess. It would have been difficult to single out any given man and say he was intoxicated.

The door opened and Lucy entered. She paused a moment on finding the room dark.

'Are you there, Carrie?' she asked.

'Yes, dear, here I am. Come to the window and watch these people. San Pablo is in a ferment.'

Lucy came slowly forward. 'Why are you all in the dark?' she inquired.

'I couldn't sit here and look out if I had a light behind me, could I?' answered Carrie. 'Tell me, dear,' she went on, making room for her friend beside her, 'where's your father and —and Mr. Scott?'

'They have just started for San Antonio,' answered the Sheriff's daughter.

'A night like this!' exclaimed Carrie in surprise. 'Why, they can't see the road.'

'Papa knows the way very well,' answered

Lucy. 'He didn't think it was safe to keep Mr. Scott here over-night, so he took him down to the livery stable, got his team out quietly, and started off the back way.'

'Didn't think it was safe!' echoed Carrie. 'Why, he wasn't afraid Mr. Scott would try to escape, was he?'

'No, no! Papa doesn't think Mr. Scott guilty any more than I do. That was not the danger.'

Lucy spoke calmly, but there was a suggestion of nervous tension in her voice and an uncertain, tremulous motion of the hands, that did not escape her companion.

'What's the matter, Lucy?' she asked. 'You're all upset about something. Has anything happened?'

Then Lady Lucy gave way altogether, and leaning her head on her friend's shoulder sobbed unrestrainedly for a few minutes. Carrie did not speak, but drew the weeping girl close to her, and stroked her hair with a soothing touch that seemed to have an effect at last.

'I am so glad they have got away safely,' she said presently. 'I suppose that is what makes me so foolish; but I feel better now.'

'But what is there to be afraid of?' persisted Carrie.

'The Committee of Safety,' answered Lucy.

'The Committee of Safety! What's that?' inquired the bewildered stranger.

'We've had so much disturbance and riot lately,' explained Lucy, 'that the citizens have organised a Vigilance Committee to keep order.'

'You Californians are a queer people,' remarked the New York girl. 'Do you mean to say you have to get up a mob to enforce the law? Haven't you any policemen?'

'Police? No!' answered Lucy. 'Papa's Sheriff, you know, and with the assistance of the two deputies he is supposed to keep the entire county in order.'

'Supposed is good, so far as I can see,' remarked Carrie, glancing down at the Plaza, where the crowd seemed to increase every moment.

'There's Judge Boone,' said Lucy, as the doors of the Spread Eagle swung open; 'he's sure to be a ringleader. How glad I am that papa has got clear off!'

'But if the man is a judge,' remarked Carrie, 'surely he will uphold the law.'

'He isn't a judge really,' explained Lucy.

'The first day he came here he was referee at a chicken fight, and they've called him judge ever since. Titles don't mean much here.'

'Well, you Californians are the queerest people,' said Carrie.

'What's that? what's that?' exclaimed Lucy, leaning forward anxiously. 'What are they going to do now?'

There was a movement in the crowd, and a couple of barrels that stood outside Smith's store were rolled forward into the centre of the Plaza. Some one laid a plank across them, and the extemporary platform thus furnished was at once occupied. The mob gathered round in a dense mass, and the speaker, to judge by his gestures, was treating the bystanders to a very animated address.

Lucy grew almost frantic. 'Who is it, Carrie? Oh, who is it?' she gasped.

'I can't tell, dear; it is so dark just there,' answered the other.

At this moment the doors of the saloon were flung back, and a man rushed out. The hoarse applause, as it emphasised the points of the orator, reached the girls where they sat. The light that poured from the Spread Eagle was

cut off in a moment as the doors swung to, but Lucy had caught a glimpse of the speaker's face and she sank back in her chair.

'It is Field!' she said faintly.

'Mr. Field, the editor of the "Independent"?' asked Carrie. 'Oh, well, he'll keep them in hand. He'll certainly preach moderation.'

'You don't know him,' said Lucy. 'He's the most mischievous, unruly! Papa says he's a regular firebrand. Carrie,' she added, springing impulsively to her feet, 'I must hear what that man is saying.'

She caught up a long cloak which was lying on a chair and moved toward the door. Carrie started up aghast.

'Lucy Starkweather, you don't mean to say you're going out into that crowd!'

'I must, Carrie; I must hear what they intend to do. Do you know, if they decide to execute their bloodthirsty law on poor Mr. Scott, nothing can save him, and papa will lose his life trying to defend him.'

'But Lucy, reflect,' urged Carrie, clinging to her friend's dress. 'What good can you do? And they have gone. They're a couple of miles on the road to San Antonio by this time.'

'That is the only comfort I have,' cried Lucy; 'but how do I know they will be safe in San Antonio? These men would think nothing of following them, and papa will not be prepared. I must know, Carrie—I must know. Let me go!' And, tearing herself from her friend's grasp, Lucy burst from the room.

Carrie hesitated a moment. Her first impulse was to follow, but a wild shout from the mob outside came just in time to unnerve her. With pale cheeks and trembling limbs she turned back to the window, and, dropping on her knees, rested her elbows on the sill and gazed out on the square, which sent up murmurs through the darkness as if swept by the waves of an invisible ocean. She saw a black-shrouded figure pass out from the hotel verandah, and she knew Lucy had mingled with the turbulent crowd.

CHAPTER VI

WHEN Mr. Byrne returned from Morley's Plateau that afternoon, leading by the ear his son and heir, and remonstrating with the lad on the morbid taste for horrors which he displayed, the hon. gentleman had a double object in view. He wished first to remove his boy from temptation, and he was also anxious to see that the bartender who presided at the Spread Eagle was alert and ready, for Mr. Byrne expected a large trade in the evening. It was within his experience than any excitement or unusual occurrence had a tendency to promote thirst in San Pablo, and, long as he had resided there, he had never seen stronger symptoms of excitement in the village than he had seen that day.

As they passed the church Mr. Byrne yielded to young Pat's entreaties and let go his ear.

'Why aren't ye at home studyin' in yer book?' inquired the father with some asperity.

'I tell you, Pop,' answered the boy. 'there's no lessons to-morrow. It's the school picnic.'

'Ay, so it is,' remarked Byrne; 'I might ha' known, but this thing has put ivery thing out o' me head. Let me see; ye go to the vineyard, don't ye?'

'Of course we do. Didn't you tell Mr. Jeffries that as long as you couldn't get your grapes picked he might as well have his picnic there, for the more we'd eat the less there'd be to rot.'

'Don't you ate too much, Pat, me boy,' said the father; 'but sure ye'd have better sinse nor to do the like o' that.'

'Well, I should smile,' answered young Byrne with supreme contempt. 'Grapes are no treat to me. I can have all I want any time. Let the other kids burst themselves with the trash if they feel like it, but not yours truly.'

'That's right, me boy,' said his father approvingly. 'It'll be a thrate to the other childer, an' may give the docthor a job, which he stands in nade of, the dacent man, but you know betther.'

By this time they had reached the Plaza, and, having ordered Pat to 'run off an' play

himself,' Mr. Byrne senior entered the Spread Eagle.

As soon as the doors closed behind his father, Mr. Byrne junior, whose appetite for horrors was as yet unsatisfied, took the back track at a speed which would make but little of the half mile or so which separated Morley's Plateau from the village Plaza.

The Hon. Pat found the bar-tender at his post, and a loafer, who answered to the name of Corvey when not too drunk to answer to anything, was endeavouring to negotiate a glass of liquor with the official in charge. As Corvey had neither cash nor credit the transaction was not very hopeful, and Byrne cut it short.

'G' long out o' this, Corvey. Haven't ye nothing betther to do nor try an bum whiskey?'

Corvey explained that he would be incapable of such conduct, and that he had only dropped in to report to Mr. Whitehead the news of Dick Morley's murder.

'Ay, it's a fine reporter ye'd make. I must ax Mr. Field to put ye on the staff of the "Indipindint,"' said Mr. Byrne with fine irony. Then, as Corvey slunk out, he turned to Whitehead.

'Ye've plinty of stock in, Charley?'

'Plenty,' answered the bar-tender.

'There'll be a power dhrunk here the night. This business o' poor Dick Morley's has raised the divil in the boys.'

'Well, we'll try and lay him if drink 'll do it,' responded Whitehead cheerfully, tucking up his sleeves and preparing for the rush that seemed imminent.

Mr. Byrne stepped behind the bar and assisted him in arranging the glasses and bottles conveniently at hand. As a general thing the Hon. Pat, though sole proprietor of the Spread Eagle, would have scorned to interfere; but this was a special occasion. Besides, the saloon was empty. All the available population of San Pablo was grouped around Colonel Morley's house, or straggling homeward along the ravine road.

'Field 's up there yet,' muttered Pat. 'It seems to me that for a gintleman and a scholar, he takes a power o' interest in a matter o' this kind.'

'He's a newspaper man,' remarked Whitehead, 'so it's his business in a way.'

'That's thrue,' assented Byrne; 'but it's onconvanient I can't see him just now. There's

a special correspondent from the San Francisco "Morning Summons" doin' the vineyards down this way, and whin he comes I want him looked afther.'

'Oh, Field 'll attend to that right enough,' said Whitehead. 'When do you expect the chap from the bay?'

'I expect him whin I see him, the same as any other newspaper man,' answered Byrne. 'You make the world o' him, av ye see him, Charley, fer by rason o' this sthrike I can't show him any great shakes in the vineyard line, an' there's the more cause for bein' tindher o' the young man.'

Presently the saloon began to fill up as various groups dropped in, fresh from the scene of the murder. The Hon. Pat was affable and talkative, and extended numerous invitations to partake of the hospitalities of the place, and accepted or excused himself from ten times as many. Presently Field entered, and Byrne drew him aside and explained that he desired him to be on the watch for the San Francisco correspondent.

'What's his name?' inquired Field.

'I have it here,' answered Byrne, producing

a large bundle of letters from his breast pocket, and sorting one out of the mass. 'Here's the letther of interduction he sint me. His name's Mr. James Ruggles, an' he's comin' to write up our grapes—if he was come to help gether them I won't say but what he'd be more welcome, but sure God's will be done. I want ye to take him under yer censorship, Mr. Field, an' show him around. Enny expense ye can charge to the office, an' av coorse I needn't tell ye that everything here from champagne down is free, an' av ye don't see what ye want, ax fer it. D'ye mind now?'

'When does the gentleman arrive?' inquired Field, who had taken rapid notes of the instructions given him.

'He's comin' over from San Miguel, on horseback likely. He'll be here some time to-night, so be on the look-out for him.'

By this time the saloon was crowded. It was growing dark, and lamps were lighted and hung in front of broad reflectors. The room looked cheerful and animated, and contrasted pleasantly with the gathering darkness outside. Mr. Byrne had not been deceived in his forecast. San Pablo was all astir; the Plaza was growing more

crowded every moment, and the people passed the doors of the Spread Eagle in an almost continuous stream.

Everyone seemed to be speaking at once, and the talk grew louder and wilder as bottles were opened and glasses drained. The death of Dick Morley and the fate of his murderer were the sole topics of conversation.

'It's come to this, boys,' said Boone dogmatically, addressing the little group of which he was the centre, 'either this ere town has got to be run to suit murderers and loafers and bummers, or it's got to be run so as decent people can live in it. There's no two ways about it.'

'Jack Scott ain't no loafer nor bummer,' remarked Hank Dollett.

'Who said he was?' retorted Boone. 'I said loafers and bummers and murderers—includin' all the criminal classes. Now, he's a murderer, I s'pose. There ain't no gettin' round that.'

'No; it looks pretty much as if the Judge had got it right,' admitted Smith, and other voices murmured assent.

Field, having escaped from Byrne, joined the group.

'It's just as Judge Boone says, boys,' he remarked. 'What's the good of having a Vigilance Committee if it don't work? We were doin' first rate; we ran Juan Estudillo out of town, we made the dagoes sing mighty small, and now, when the worst crime of all is committed, are we going to weaken just because the man that shot Dick Morley was one of ourselves and a man who ought to have known better? No, I say.'

Mr. Field's words were cheered to the echo, and Hank, reaching over to the bar, grasped a bottle of whiskey from which he filled the empty glasses.

Meanwhile another group, collected around Pat Bryne, was discussing the same question.

'It's printed in your own paper, Mr. Byrne,' said a tall, dark-browed fellow, a dealer in fish, known all over San Antonio county as Every-Day Pete; 'here it is,' and the speaker struck a copy of the 'Independent' so violently as to tear it, before he read:

'It is with great pleasure that we announce to our readers the foundation of a Committee of Safety, which has undertaken to rid the town of the ruffians who have been holding a carnival

of crime in our midst. The majesty of the law will hereafter be maintained in full force. The penalty of the next infraction of the peace is death. The robber or the murderer who falls into the hands of the Committee of Safety will be hanged without benefit of clergy. Let the evil-doers beware.'

Every-Day Pete had a harsh, high-pitched voice, and before he had finished he had an audience far more considerable than his own immediate group. As he concluded, a ringing cheer broke from all parts of the crowded bar-room, interspersed with such words of endorsement as 'Bully for you!' 'That's the peach!' 'Sock it to 'em,' and the like. Mr. Field, the author of the paragraph, bowed his head and stood modestly conscious of his merit.

Every-Day Pete turned on Mr. Byrne.

'There it is in your own paper. Are you going back on it after printing the Committee's proclamation yourself?'

The Hon. Pat's position was not easy. An habitual trimmer, he now found himself confronted by a force whose theory he had approved, but whose practice all his instincts condemned. In this position he could be consistent in only

one direction. He could continue to trim, and he did so.

'My friends,' he said, throwing himself into an oratorical pose, 'A Committee of Safety or a Vigilance Committee may be a very good thing, an' I don't say, havin' regard to the sarcumstances o' the case, that we could ha' done any betther. Them's my sintimints that ye read in the "Indipindint," and it's to vice me sintimints to this community that I pay Foxy—I beg his pardon, Mr.—Chamberlain Field, a gentleman and a scholar, twinty-five dollars a week. But—ye'll folly me in this, fellow-citizens—a Vigilance Committee, the best o' thim, ain't the law, and anything outside the law or alongside the law is a poor look-out for a man in my position, that owns the vineyard, and the newspaper and the best sample room in San Pablo, wid over wan-fifth o' the taxable property o' the township to boot.'

Byrne's speech was received with mingled cheers and laughter. Corvey, who had come back with the crowd, and had contrived to pick up his share where liquor was so plenty, felt emboldened to remark:

'You own too much, Mr. Byrne; that's the trouble.'

'Maybe I'd betther make over the sample room to you. There'd be no fear o' the stock spoilin' on your hands, anyway,' retorted the proprietor.

This raised another laugh at the expense of Corvey, but the temper of the crowd did not improve.

'I say Lynch Law, rather than no law,' shouted Every-Day Pete, 'and if the Sheriff can't keep peace in this part of the county——'

'Go aisy, there, Pete,' interrupted Byrne. 'It was me nominated Sam Starkweather for sheriff, an' a betther, a dacenter, an honester man niver walked the sile o' the free an' glorious state o' California.'

There was a general movement of the crowd toward the door. Some new impulse had seized on the men, and they were trooping out of the saloon with Field, Boone, and the leading spirits at their head.

Pat exchanged glances with his bar-tender. 'Sam's beyant at the hotel,' he said. 'I think he'd betther know what kind o' temper the boys are in,' and Mr. Byrne passed out with the last of the throng. The saloon remained nearly empty.

A rude platform had been improvised outside, and Foxy Field was haranguing the mob. Byrne did not stop to listen, but forced his way on toward the hotel.

'Gentlemen,' shouted Field, as a dead silence fell on the pushing, struggling crowd, 'the majesty of the law has been outraged. Our distinguished fellow-citizen, Colonel Richard Morley, has been assassinated. With the enterprise characteristic of a true newspaper man, I was at the scene of carnage before the shooting took place. Citizens of San Pablo, the red hand of murder has been unsheathed in our midst. Murder's been done, and the murderer has got to swing for it. There's no appeal from Judge Lynch except to the Supreme Judge of all mankind.'

A hoarse cheer from the crowd emphasised the speaker's words.

Young Pat Byrne, returning from Morley's Plateau, stopped in wonderment at the scene in the Plaza. Field continued to speak with a ready flow of words that were not without a kind of rude eloquence. Mr. Byrne entered the hotel, stumbling in his haste against Haman Jeffries, who stood in the doorway.

'This is bad business, Mr. Jeffries,' said Byrne.

'They will talk and drink all night and do nothing,' said the schoolmaster, and there was a touch of impatience in his voice.

'They'll get through talkin', an' get to doin' presently, and then they'll do more in a minute than they can undo in their lives,' answered Byrne, passing on into the hotel.

Jeffries shivered, and then, coming down the steps, drew nearer to the speaker.

Young Pat started violently as a light hand was laid on his shoulder and a soft voice whispered in his ear.

'Do you know what they're going to do, Pat?'

'How you scared me, Miss Lucy,' said the boy. 'No, I don't know what they're up to and I can't wait. The Sheriff sent me to——'

'Hasn't he gone to San Antonio?' asked Lucy breathlessly.

'He started, he and Mr. Scott, but it was so dark that he drove into the gully near the church and smashed the waggon. The horses bolted on for their own stable, and are half-way to San Antonio by this time, most likely. He sent me

back to ask my Pop for the loan of a waggon to go on with.'

'Oh, God! they have not got away, then!' said Lucy in an agonised whisper.

'No, they're waiting in the church till they can get a team. I must go and find Pop,' replied the boy.

'Pat, will you do me a favour?' asked Lucy.

'Anything in life, Miss Lucy,' replied the youngster with the ready chivalry of boyhood. 'What do you want me to do?'

'Run back and—no, no,' Lucy interrupted herself and thought a moment. 'Go and find your father and tell him what has happened, but do not tell anyone else; don't breathe it to a soul that any accident has happened.'

'Why not?' asked Pat.

'Because I beg it of you. Promise! You won't say a word?'

'Not a word then, since you don't want me to; but, Miss Lucy, where are you going?'

'I'm going up to the church to see my father.'

'But aren't you scared? It's dreadful dark, and——'

'Please do as I ask you. Won't you, Pat?'

'All right, Miss Lucy. You can count on me every time,' answered the boy, starting toward the hotel.

A wild cheer from the crowd hailed the fiery peroration which concluded Field's speech.

'Bring out the bloody murderer!' 'I'll talk to the Sheriff!' 'Law and order for ever!'

Thus the crowd, surging forward with wild yells. Haman Jeffries stepped out of the throng and pressed his black sombrero down over his brows.

'Now they will act,' he muttered with a strange smile.

Lucy drew back as the advance guard of the mob approached her. For one breathless moment she listened to the shouts and curses with which the avengers of blood heralded their advance.

Then she drew her cloak closely around her, and, light as a bird, fled up the sandy road that led to the church.

CHAPTER VII

It took some time to convince the mob that the Sheriff had really carried his prisoner out of San Pablo. The hotel was thoroughly searched, and it was not till Boone thought of examining the livery stable, and discovered that Mr. Starkweather's waggon was gone, that he would be persuaded that his prey had actually escaped him. Then the active members of the committee returned to the Spread Eagle, to drink more whiskey and to deliberate on the next step.

The Hon. Pat Byrne had heard his son's report of the accident, and was sorely disquieted thereat. He had been relieved to learn of the Sheriff's timely retreat, but this unfortunate break-down renewed the peril.

Byrne, though he was slow of speech, was accustomed to think quickly and to the purpose in cases of emergency, and he at once pronounced

impracticable the scheme of sending a carriage to the Sheriff's rescue. Any action of that kind would be apt to awaken suspicion, and the best plan seemed to be to wait until the town grew quiet before attempting anything. So Mr. Byrne sent Pat to bed, and joined the revellers in his saloon, where he took an early opportunity of putting the clock an hour ahead, in hopes o deluding the excited villagers into returning to their homes.

On the whole, things seemed to have quieted down a little. A few hot heads proposed to mount and pursue the prisoner along the San Antonio road, but the darkness of the night and the creature comforts of the Spread Eagle furnished solid arguments against such extreme measures.

Haman Jeffries, resisting all invitations to join the social groups, left San Pablo as soon as the Sheriff's flight had been ascertained, and went for a solitary walk through the gloomy shades of the chaparral. He followed the road that led to Morley's Plateau.

The day of excitement had left Kate Morley weak and unstrung. It would be too much to say that she had any real grief for her

brutalised husband; but sudden death is a startling thing, and murder is appalling. She was keenly alive to Jack Scott's danger—the more so as he had become embroiled with Dick by resenting the insults which the latter had hurled at herself; and besides, she had always felt an interest in the young man. He had been accustomed to treat her with a mixture of sympathy and deference which was strange to the wife of Drunken Dick. So she sat on the verandah, with an unacknowledged reluctance to keep a lonely vigil under the roof that sheltered her husband's corpse. She sat and gazed down into the darkness, thinking her own sad thoughts, and so Haman Jeffries found her.

The widow was startled by the approaching footsteps, and still more discomposed when the schoolmaster's voice betrayed his identity, but he would accept no repulse from her manner, and came up and joined her on the verandah.

'Mrs. Morley,' he said; 'I've long waited a chance to have a few words with you. It's well I waited, perhaps; they'll come easier now.'

Kate made no reply, and he went on:

'You are well rid of that fellow—he was a

millstone round your neck. You are better without him.'

'That is not a respectful way to speak of the dead,' she remonstrated.

'The dead! What matter the dead? How are they better than we are? Why should they be treated with more consideration than the living? They all breathed once till Fate struck them, and they left the world to those for whom Fate has something still in store.'

Kate was not so bewildered by this odd address as many women would have been. The schoolmaster had often spoken to her in this strain, and therein lay the secret of at least a portion of the dislike and dread with which she regarded him. Her voice was calm as she answered:

'We will not discuss my late husband, if you please, Mr. Jeffries.'

'As you wish,' he replied. 'I had a strange dream a night or two since, Kate.'

She drew a little further away from him with a movement full of repulsion. It might have been her unspoken protest against his unwarranted familiarity. Jeffries went on without noticing it:



'I thought I saw you at the top of one of those great redwoods. I called to you, but you were looking far off to sea. I climbed; I wished to reach you: I passed branch after branch, and each had the likeness of someone I knew. I spurned them all under my feet. At last I reached one branch—it was the likeness of your husband, and as I stood upon that and stretched out my hands, I thought I could touch you.'

'Mr. Jeffries——' began Kate indignantly; but he went on in the same even tone, and the woman resigned herself to listen.

'But there was still another bough intervening, and I grasped it and sought to swing myself above it. It withered, it bent, it twisted beneath my efforts. I had almost succeeded when you stepped down and joined me. We stood there together; we met on that branch, and it seemed strangely like——'

Kate was interested in spite of herself. 'Well,' she said as he paused.

'It was like Jack Scott.'

Kate started and would have risen, but he laid a detaining hand on her arm.

'Do not go, Kate,' he whispered. 'Dreams have a meaning to those who know how to read

them right. Dreams are sent from Heaven. They are feeble sparkles of light by which the clear-eyed soul can guide itself through the dusk of the future.'

'How did your dream end?' asked Kate.

'In darkness,' answered Jeffries. 'I felt and knew no more. That puzzles me, but the first part of the dream is as clear a message as ever spirit gave to the most gifted intelligence. See how it has already fulfilled itself. Your husband is nothing. He is swept aside. We are made for each other—my soul claims kindred with yours——'

'Leave me at once,' cried Kate, rising indignantly. 'How dare you address such words to me?'

'I must speak,' answered Jeffries calmly. 'Our future is fixed; there is no escaping it. We are advancing towards each other by the same road. Nothing can keep us asunder.'

'Mr. Jeffries,' said Kate, controlling her voice with an effort, 'I think you must be mad, and I am little better to have listened to you so long.'

Jeffries laughed bitterly.

'How lightly the world uses that solemn

word, madness. People apply it to all that they cannot understand. The gifted intelligence that can peer through the thin veil that sunders us from our destiny is, in the eyes of common mortals, only *mad*. Do you love me, Kate?' he asked suddenly.

'No, a thousand times, no,' cried Kate, breaking from the hand that he laid on her arm, an going toward the house.

The schoolmaster intercepted her before she could reach the door.

'A word, only a word, Mrs. Morley,' he pleaded. 'I have been too abrupt; I have not considered your feelings. Of course you do not expect me to condole with you, as with one who has suffered any loss, but you have passed through a terrible experience, and on that I offer you my sympathy. For what remains for you to bear, you can count on my support.'

'Thank you, Mr. Jeffries,' answered Kate, coldly; 'but in the future, as in the past, I can bear my burden alone.'

'Not alone when you know I seek no greater privilege than to protect and comfort you,'

urged Jeffries. 'The only obstacle that separated us has vanished——'

'Not the only one,' interrupted Kate.

'Jack Scott will perish by the law—even if he escapes the hands of the mob.'

'I did not refer to Mr. Scott,' said Kate hastily. 'His name has no place in this conversation. The obstacle is one which neither time nor murder, ay, neither time nor murder can do away,' she went on, repeating the words as she noticed that the schoolmaster shrank as she uttered them, 'neither time nor murder can ever remove my invincible repugnance to you.'

'Peace, girl,' uttered Jeffries savagely, gripping her arm as he spoke. 'Do you think your feeble words or feebler acts can alter the course of your destiny, irrevocably fixed for you, as it was fixed for me, millions of years before either of us saw the light of this world?'

'Let me go, Mr. Jeffries,' interrupted Kate. 'You hurt my arm.'

He went on without heeding her:

'If not to-day, to-morrow. I have waited so long I can afford to wait longer, and the fate that has marked us for each other will not swerve aside for your puny resistance.'

'Fate or no fate,' answered she, speaking bravely and steadily. 'My life is in my own hands. I would take it without a second's hesitation sooner than yield to you.'

'Brave words, my lady,' sneered Jeffries; 'brave words! But when the pistol is at your head or the knife at your throat, death has strange terrors. I speak who know,' he went on with a shudder; 'but that nerve fails us few men would live so long.'

'Will you release my arm, Mr. Jeffries? You hurt me.'

'Begone then,' he said, pushing her from him. 'I know the secret of your stubbornness; you love Jack Scott.'

'You paltry coward!' cried Kate.

'Do you think you can blind me,' pursued Jeffries, 'when yonder dead, drunken fool had penetrated your secret? You love Jack Scott, and he is a murderer, whose life is forfeit to the law.'

'You lie,' cried Kate indignantly. 'He is innocent, and no jury would convict him on such evidence.'

'No jury will be asked to convict him,' retorted Jeffries. 'He will be sentenced by a

judge who does not stand on technicalities and quibbles—Judge Lynch.'

Kate gasped with horror. 'You do not mean——' she faltered, but the schoolmaster went pitilessly on.

'It would look like murder to you, Kate; naturally, naturally. But our law-abiding citizens think differently. When I see you next Jack Scott will be out of the way, and I will renew my suit and hope for a more favourable answer.'

He paused for a reply, but none came. Kate had sunk on her knees, and was holding up her hands in voiceless prayer toward the darkened heavens. Jeffries descended the steps, and gaining the road took his way toward the village, muttering to himself as he went.

Just before he reached the church he stumbled over an object which lay at the roadside. The place was very dark, but the evidence of his touch convinced him that it was a broken-down waggon. He passed his hand over it again. There was no mistake. It was a large but light two-horse vehicle of a sort that was not very common in the country. Breathlessly he felt in his pocket for a match, and struck it. His hand



trembled so that it was with difficulty he shielded the feeble flame from the faint breeze, but he succeeded, and the flicker of light told him all he wished to know. Sheriff Starkweather's waggon lay overturned on the roadside at the very edge of the gully.

The match burned down to Jeffries' fingers, and died out. He sprang to his feet and hurried forward down the road. His mind grasped in a moment all the consequences that might be entailed by the accident. A turn in the path brought into view the lights of San Pablo shining in the plain below. And now that he was clear of the chaparral he noticed that the moon had risen. He dashed on, crossed the Plaza, and burst breathless into the crowded bar-room of the Spread Eagle.

CHAPTER VIII

As Lucy ran up the steep, sandy track toward the church, she felt as if Jack Scott's life hung upon her speed. If the lawless gang below should guess that her father's journey had been interrupted, she knew that nothing could save him. Ruder than the lawless hordes of the dark ages, the Vigilance Committee would respect no sanctuary, but would drag the victim from the altar itself. She had done what she could to prevent the news of the accident spreading abroad, but chance might reveal it at any moment. Even at night the road was frequented, and any passer-by might see the waggon and bring word to the village, and the merest hint meant destruction to her friends. On she sped, trembling as she ran, and fearing each moment to meet some messenger returning with the death sentence.

Meanwhile her father and Jack, having

escaped without injury from the wreck of the waggon, sat and smoked in the church porch.

'They were in a very ugly temper,' remarked the Sheriff, 'and they were getting uglier. There was nothing for it but to get you out of town. The break-down was unlucky, but I don't suppose it 'll matter much. The boys 'll think you are in the hotel still and will amuse themselves watching there. By-and-by I'll get hold of Pat Byrne's team and snake you over to San Antonio so quick we'll make lightning loll.'

Jack stepped out of the porch and looked down the road.

'It seems quiet enough down there,' he said.

'Come back, come back,' exclaimed the Sheriff, pulling him under cover. 'Your life wouldn't be worth ten minutes' purchase if any one saw you. It's dark now, but the moon 'll rise in half an hour or so, and then we'll have to lay low and sing small till it's late enough to make a start for it.'

'It's hard that I should have to be in hiding for such a reason,' cried Scott bitterly.

'Don't take that to heart, my boy,' said the Sheriff kindly. 'I don't believe that you

murdered anyone, and if you had time and a fair trial you'd clear yourself all right. But circumstances are against you, and I could do nothing less than arrest you, and a mighty good thing for you, too. San Antonio's a pleasanter neighbourhood for you than San Pablo with the Committee of Safety, and though I can't say much for our jail accommodations, they're a sight healthier than a limb of one of those trees, even if they're not quite so airy. It's that and nothing else that the boys are saving up for you.'

The two men sat silent for a space, and the stillness grew so profound that Scott fancied he could hear the beating of his own heart.

A faint sound became audible from the road below, the tread of a light, quick foot; the hurried breathing of some one running at speed. Jack sprang to his feet. The Sheriff, alert in a moment, pressed him down.

''Ssh, some one's coming,' he said, and sheltering himself behind the door he peered out into the darkness.

The steps came on through the little gate in the picket fence which surrounded the churchyard. Mr. Starkweather could trace the outlines

of a figure on the sanded path, and a low voice which he knew well, though now altered and sharpened by anxiety, called to him by name.

'Is the Sheriff there? Are you there, papa?'

'Why, it's Lucy,' said Starkweather, stepping out to meet her. 'What brings you here, my girl?'

'Oh, papa, I have run every step of the way from the village. It is terrible down there. All the men are out, and many of them are masked and armed. They have been hunting for you and Mr. Scott—they have searched the hotel.'

'So soon,' said the Sheriff, setting his teeth hard. 'Do they know we are here?'

'I think not, but anyone may pass and see the waggon, and then they will suspect.'

'How did you learn it, Lucy?' asked her father

'Young Byrne told me,' she answered.

'Ay, I sent him down to see his father about a fresh team,' said Mr. Starkweather. 'Has he told anyone else, do you suppose?'

'I think I was the first he spoke to, and he

promised he'd tell no one but his father,' replied the girl.

'That was well thought of.' He spoke slowly, like a man in deep thought.

'You must escape at once, papa,' said Lucy impulsively; 'there's not a moment to lose.'

'Ay, is that so, my girl?' he answered deliberately. 'That'll bear thinking about.'

'Why, papa, what else can you do?'

'Fair and easy goes far in a day,' said the Sheriff calmly. 'If we make a bolt for it, they've got horses and can catch us up in no time, and they know the only road we can take is the road to San Antonio. Whereas, if we stay here, the church is strong and will stand a bit of a siege. They won't get in without trouble, and if I have time to talk to them, it 'll go hard but I 'll persuade some of them out of their mad scheme.'

'You know best, papa,' said Lucy, 'but I had to warn you.'

'And it was bravely done, my girl. Run home now, and stay there till this business is finished one way or the other.'

Lucy came closer, and kissed her father. He

returned the embrace, and rested his hand lightly on her head for a moment.

'Run along now, dear,' he repeated; but Lucy still lingered.

'How is Mr. Scott?' she asked after a moment's hesitation.

'Brave and hearty,' answered Mr. Starkweather. 'He's a good lad, Lucy, and I don't believe it was he plugged Dick Morley.'

'Oh, papa! As if there was any need to tell me that. May I see him for a minute?'

'Certainly not,' answered her father decidedly.

'Please let me see him—only for a moment,' urged Lucy.

'What for?' inquired the Sheriff.

'To tell him that I—that we all believe in him. To encourage him, to—to——.' She broke down in her entreaty, and stood looking up in her father's face.

'Child, I can say all that to him,' he replied.

'Not as I can say it,' persisted the girl.

'This is no time to bother the poor boy,' objected Starkweather.

'Oh, papa, for a minute! Please, for one little minute,' she pleaded.

The moon was slowly climbing up the eastern horizon, and a little light was beginning to filter through the trees.

The Sheriff laid his hands on his daughter's shoulders, and bending down looked into her eyes. The girl did not flinch, but met her father's gaze bravely, and the colour that mantled in her cheeks passed unnoticed in the dusk. But Mr. Starkweather's instinct penetrated the secret of his motherless girl.

He threw his arm around her, and drew her close to him, speaking very kindly, very tenderly:

'And so, Lucy, Jack Scott has been courting you, eh?'

The girl had buried her face for a moment on her father's broad breast, but she seemed to scorn that vantage and looked fearlessly up in his eyes as she answered: 'No, papa, he has never said anything to me yet; but I think—indeed I know he loves me although he has never spoken. And when I think I may never see him again I feel as though I should die.'

'There, there, my girl, dry your eyes,' said Mr. Starkweather. 'You shall have a word with him. Step into the porch, for he mustn't show himself outside.' Then he called to Scott.

'Jack, here's my little girl has a word or two to say to you. I'm going to take a look down the road. Don't forget you're my prisoner. I'll take your word that you stay where you are.'

'You have it, sir,' answered Jack from within.

'All right,' answered the Sheriff. Then he walked down to the gate in the picket fence, and Lucy entered the porch.

Jack grasped her hand warmly.

'You have made me very happy by coming here, Miss Starkweather,' he said; 'for it shows me that you do not believe me guilty.'

'How could I believe such a thing of you?' exclaimed Lucy.

The shade of indignation in her tone was very pleasant to Jack, and his voice had an earnest ring as he answered: 'I thank you for your trust in me, and I pray Heaven I may never do anything to forfeit it.'

'I felt that I must come to you, in the hour of peril, to say good-bye,' faltered Lucy. 'I may never see you again.'

'Don't fear for me,' answered Jack. 'The evidence against me is purely circumstantial, and it will be scattered to the winds when we investigate.'

'What will that avail if they murder you to-night?' urged Lucy. 'It is not the law of the land I fear; it is Lynch law.'

'Nonsense,' replied Jack with affected lightness. 'The boys know me. It is not as if some stranger were in this plight. They can't believe this of me; and besides, I am popular with them.'

'Every popular man has enemies,' objected Lucy.

'He has more friends.'

'At times like these the friends hang in the background. It is the enemies who press to the front.'

She spoke mournfully, and Jack sought to raise her spirits by his reply.

'You have come to the front to-night. Must I reckon you as an enemy, then?'

'Oh, what can I do?' she wailed passionately. 'A poor weak girl! What difference does it make what I do?'

'All the difference in the world to me,' answered Jack. 'Before you came I was cast down, I confess; but now, whatever comes, you have given me courage to meet it like a man.'

'Hark! What is that?' exclaimed Lucy, as a sound of whispered words reached her ear from

outside. Holding Jack's hand and trembling from suspense and nervousness, she stepped from the shadow of the porch.

'Why, it's Mrs. Morley,' said Scott.

'Talking to papa! What can she want?' whispered Lucy in an agony of apprehension.

Kate Morley, on her way to the village to see for herself if there was any truth in Jeffries' parting words, had met the Sheriff, and was glad of an opportunity to tell him all she had heard. She acquainted him with what the schoolmaster had said, and, a good deal reassured by the cool firm attitude of Mr. Starkweather, was about to return to her home, when Jack and Lucy stepped from the porch.

She caught her breath as from a sudden pang when she saw them, and spoke with difficulty as she pointed them out to the Sheriff.

'Ah, there's your daughter, I see; come to comfort the poor fellow, I suppose.'

The Sheriff glanced at her sharply, but there was no shade of irony in her voice.

'She came to see him and say good-bye,' he answered, 'in case things take a bad turn.'

Kate turned on him with sudden fierceness.

'A bad turn? What do you mean? He's

your prisoner, and you are responsible to God and man for his safe keeping. You don't intend to give him up?'

'Not much,' answered the Sheriff with grim decision.

She seemed satisfied with the reply, and turning back from the gate climbed the hill toward her home without a backward glance.

The Sheriff looked after her. The moon was now above the trees, and he could follow her figure till it was hidden by the chaparral.

'There's the widow of the murdered man,' he muttered, 'and there's the man they say killed him, and she's moving heaven and earth to save his life. Don't tell me Jack had any hand in the shooting after that.'

Then Mr. Starkweather turned from the gate and walked slowly up the path toward the church-door. The figures of Jack and Lucy were visible in the new moonlight as they stood in the porch, and as he drew nearer he could hear their words.

'If anything should happen to you,' said the girl, who stood with her hand on Jack's sleeve as if loth to leave him.

Then a great wave of passion swept over

the young man and forced him to speak whether he would or not.

'Oh, Lucy, I would fear nothing, I would care for nothing if I thought you loved me as I love you.'

This was his declaration and his appeal, and no further words were needed between them. Her eyes gave him all the reply he sought, and he drew her toward him and kissed her on brow, on cheek, on lips.

And so the Sheriff found them when he reached the door.

'Hallo, how's this?' cried Starkweather. 'I thought there had been no sparking.'

They did not start at his voice nor shrink apart.

'It is the first word of love I ever breathed to her,' said Jack, simply.

'And it may be the last,' murmured Lucy, 'but oh, I am glad you said it.'

The Sheriff looked perplexed but not altogether displeased. 'Come, come,' cried he briskly; 'we've no time for nonsense of this kind. Have done, both of you. Go home, Lucy, and when this has blown over and Jack's safe

again, we three can talk this matter over quietly.'

'Good-bye, my darling; God bless and guard you,' said Jack fervently, and Lucy stepped down into the path and joined her father.

'Not a foot further, Jack Scott,' commanded Starkweather, as the young man sought to follow her. 'Inside with you. Remember, you are my prisoner.'

'Mr. Starkweather,' answered Jack, 'I remember all the kindness you have shown me, and I should be making an ill return for it if I got you into trouble. Don't have a fuss with these men on my account.'

'Shut up,' said the Sheriff brusquely. 'You're my prisoner, and I'm not going to swap you off for anything these villains have to offer. Now then, in with you!'

With a long lingering look at Lucy, Jack entered the church.

'Home you go, Lucy,' continued her father, 'or stay. If this business has been blown upon, you may meet the whole rabble coming up from the village. Better go up to Morley's house—no one will be likely to go there, and I promised Kate I would ask you to sit with her.'

'Just as you wish, papa,' replied the girl; but she paused before she had taken many steps. 'And Carrie?' she asked.

'Well, what about her?' demanded the Sheriff impatiently.

'I left her all alone at the hotel,' answered Lucy; 'she doesn't know I came here, and she'll be worried about me.'

'Can't help that,' said Starkweather. 'She'll have sense enough to keep indoors, and there's nothing to happen to her. Run along now, my girl.'

'Good-bye, papa,' said Lucy; 'now you'll be prudent, won't you? You'll take care of yourself—and—and——'

'And Jack Scott,' interrupted her father. 'You bet I will. Now don't fret about us. I've been in worse scrapes than this and I'm here to tell of it.'

He bent over and kissed his daughter's pale face. 'Now do go, Lucy,' he continued. 'I can't have you round here.'

'Good-bye, papa,' repeated Lucy, and her light figure was presently lost to view among the chaparral.

The Sheriff went with her to the gate. There

he paused and sent a searching glance down the road toward the village. He even stooped, and, bringing his ear close to the ground, listened intently for a minute or more. No sounds save the rasping notes of the cicada and the monotonous croaking of the tree-toads broke the stillness of the night. He rose, drew a brace of revolvers from his pocket, and tested the locks to ascertain that they worked freely. Suddenly, like a shadow out of the darkness, a woman came flying down from the direction of the Plateau. The Sheriff thought at first that it was his daughter returning, and accosted her sternly.

'No, no, it is I,' said Kate Morley's voice. 'I brought you a pistol—you are armed, of course, but Mr. Scott——'

'I have weapons for both if it comes to a question of fighting for our lives,' said Starkweather. 'It was kindly thought of, Mrs. Morley, but you had better go home. I sent Lucy up to stay with you.'

'I met her—I told her I would not be a moment; I am going back directly. Oh, Mr. Starkweather,' she went on in a voice of agony, 'do you think there is danger?'

'God knows,' answered the Sheriff shortly,

but not unkindly. 'Go home now. Lucy will be waiting for you.'

He entered the church, and she heard the rattle of the bar as he fastened the door behind him.

Kate stood a moment where he had left her. Then she slowly sank on her knees, and her lips moved in prayer. 'God help him; God pity him;' she murmured; 'I cannot go home yet. If they come here, I will meet them, I will plead with them. Surely it is my voice which should call loudest for vengeance, and if it speaks for mercy they cannot choose but listen.'

CHAPTER IX

THE fever of excitement that had worked like madness in San Pablo during the earlier evening hours had died out. The feather-brains of the village, to whom every new thing was a good thing, had cheered themselves hoarse, had drank themselves stupid, had consumed their superfluous energy in many different ways, and had finally retired to bed, prepared to take up the matter on the morrow where they had left it overnight, and renew their excesses by draughts of fiery liquor and no less fiery oratory. But the sterner spirits, like Boone and Smith and Dollett, were still afoot. These were the men to whom San Pablo owed its Vigilance Committee—men who believed they were acting for the best good of society, and who were resolved to stamp out lawlessness wherever they could reach it. The whirlwind of the evening had

passed over their heads and left them cool and resolute. The reaction came and found them cool and resolute still. A murder had been committed; proof, far more direct and conclusive than Judge Lynch exacts, appeared to fasten the crime on Scott. To their minds the sequel was never in doubt. Scott must yield his life—a life far more useful and meritorious than the life he had taken—that San Pablo's dearly-bought reputation for law and order might not perish in his person.

When Haman Jeffries entered the Spread Eagle, breathless from his run, he found the saloon crowded, but far quieter than it had been an hour or two before. There was little drinking; there was no dispute or discussion among the various groups; there was no oratorical effort to inflame the passion of the mob. On all sides there was a settled resolve, grimly evident on the dark faces of all present—a resolve that waited in silence and bided its time.

Pat Byrne was probably the only man of the thirty or more present who was out of sympathy with the general purpose. He had felt relieved when the crowd began to scatter, and the more

turbulent spirits, one by one, sought their homes; but he soon realised that those who were left represented a far more dangerous element—the element of unalterable, almost conscientious resolution. The Hon. Pat had been a politician from his boyhood, but he was not a statesman nor a leader of men. Such success as he had gained in the facile politics of his district, had been achieved, not by directing minds nor instigating motives, but by careful deference to prejudices, and by steady swimming with the tide. Mr. Byrne, with a majority at his back, was a potent force; as one of a minority, he was a trimmer and truckler who never stayed in such unwelcome society a moment longer than he could help. On this occasion, convinced as he was of Jack's innocence, and entertaining a real affection for the young man, he ventured to oppose the crowd with a courage that in a man of his disposition was little short of heroic. But a few brief, stern words from the leaders convinced him that his efforts were useless, and he drew back into a corner and watched events with a painful consciousness that for once in his life he had undertaken to champion a losing cause.

Field had just entered the room with the announcement that the moon had risen and that the light was fairly good. It had been resolved to pursue the fugitives on horseback as far as San Antonio, if necessary, but the arrival of Haman Jeffries, and the news he brought, showed the way to prompter action.

'My God, they are as good as dead men already,' groaned Pat. He was temperate as a rule, but the glass of whiskey he poured out for himself at that moment was worthy of Drunken Dick in his best days. However, Byrne's hand trembled so that not more than half the contents reached his lips.

'It will save us a ride,' said Boone grimly, as soon as the schoolmaster had told his discovery and explained where the broken waggon was lying. 'They're in one of two places; either they've sheltered in the church or they've gone on to Morley's house.'

'They're not in Morley's house, I'm sure,' exclaimed Jeffries, quickly.

'How are you sure?' asked Boone, sharply.

The schoolmaster had admitted more than he had intended.

'Is it likely,' he hesitated, 'that the mur-

derer would fly for sanctuary to the house of his victim?'

'Just as likely as not,' retorted Boone; 'anyhow the church is nearer; we'll try the church first. Now, boys,' he continued, turning to the others, 'we want no hurly-burly in this; the talking's all done. This is business.'

'Business it is,' assented Dollett; and there was a general pressing down of hats and tightening of belts, and the butts of revolvers gleamed in the lamplight as the men assured themselves that their weapons lay ready for use to their hands. Several produced crape masks which they proceeded to adjust, and the rest, following their example, extemporised shades for their faces from their handkerchiefs and neck-wear.

'Where are ye goin', boys?' asked Byrne, finding his voice with an effort.

No one noticed him. The men were trooping toward the door, but in an orderly, deliberate manner, in strong contrast to the tumultuous confusion that had swayed the mob earlier in the evening. Evidently the thirty-three men who had lingered till now were the pick of the Vigilantes.

'Straight to the church, I suppose?' suggested Field when all were assembled outside.

'Straight to the church,' commanded Boone, who had assumed a leadership which none cared to question. 'Fall in, boys; orderly now; two and two.'

He set the example by ranging himself beside Smith. Field came next with Dollett, and the others dropped behind in pairs, with a silence and readiness that spoke well for the discipline of the avengers.

'March!' cried Boone, and the sinister procession moved across the Plaza. Not a word was spoken. If any misgiving, if any hesitation at the enterprise on which he had embarked, were present in the breast of a man there, he did not show it. Silent, grim, implacable as fate, they set out on their mission of vengeance.

Haman Jeffries brought up the rear. There were sixteen pairs of the Vigilantes in the ordered ranks, and he had no companion. He followed the terrible engine he had set in motion, as though he had no part in it. But his face, always pale, looked ghastly in the moonlight, and his shadow, cast on the dusty square, was strongly marked and individual, while that of

the closely compacted band was but a dark blurred outline.

The saloon was entirely deserted. Pat Byrne stood in the door and watched the column cross the Plaza.

'Ye may close up, Charley,' he said. 'I'm goin' to folly them and see it out. Holy St. Patrick, but this is a terrible night!'

Under the drooping branches of the live oaks and mimosas; up the steep sandy path on which their steady footsteps fell with scarce a sound, beneath the deep shadows and across the broad white patches of moonlight, the band passed as silently as spectres. The woods were astir with life; the whirring noise of the great beetles, the strident chirp of the cicadas, the monotonous boom of the tree-toads, filled the air. And the avengers of blood moved on, winding like a serpent up the narrow track.

The little clearing in front of the church was reached, and the rude wooden structure gleamed cold in the moonlight. Then the head of the procession halted, and the stillness was broken by a woman's voice—a voice full of anguish and wild in its agony, pleading, arguing, wailing, threatening, by turns.

Those who were further behind heard the words that had halted their leaders, and the ranks were broken. Men ran forward to see what had happened. The clearing was quickly crowded. Haman Jeffries mingled in the throng, and Pat Byrne took heart of grace and advanced with the others.

Judge Boone and Smith, the two leaders, still stood side by side preserving their formation, and at their feet, with hands outstretched and dishevelled hair, knelt Kate Morley.

Boone raised her from the ground. 'Go home, Mrs. Morley,' he said. 'We are here for business, and you are in the way.'

Jeffries pushed to the front. It seemed as if he was content to remain in the background while everything progressed smoothly, but came forward when any obstacle threatened to obstruct the enterprise. He had slipped on a crape mask since leaving the town, and his features were hidden.

'Go home, my good woman, go home,' he said. 'This is no place for you.'

'Ah, Haman Jeffries,' cried Kate; 'truly I find you where I would have looked for you.'

He turned away abruptly, disconcerted at

the recognition, and Kate went on, speaking generally, but occasionally seeming to address one or another, as she fancied her words had produced some impression.

'Gentlemen, you will hear me. I have no interest in shielding the murderer—my husband's murderer! You all know me. I am speaking to you face to face and openly, though it pleases you to go masked. But why? What black deed are you bent on, that you are ashamed to show honest faces even to the darkness of the night?'

'Justice!' answered Boone sternly, and the word was taken up by the others and rolled through the mob in a volume of sound. 'Justice!'

'And does Justice hide its face and march by night?' cried Kate. 'Does Justice——'

'We are not here to be questioned,' interrupted Boone. 'Go home, Kate Morley.'

'I will not go home,' responded Kate, 'while I have voice left to protest against this abominable outrage. You say Mr. Scott murdered my husband! I do not believe it. Give him the right that the meanest man may claim in this free land—give him a fair trial, and I will not say a word in his behalf.'

'He has had a fair trial,' said Smith.

Kate turned on the new speaker. 'Do you think so? Has he been confronted with his accusers? Has he been heard in his own defence? Only this morning Richard Morley was alive, and to-night——'

'And to-night his murderer shall hang, interrupted Boone sternly. 'Out of the way, woman. This is a matter with which you have nothing to do.'

He thrust her aside, but she continued to cling to his arm. 'Oh, do not be so headstrong,' she urged. 'Think, reflect what you are going to do! A mistake to-night will make you murderers—worse, a thousand times worse than the real criminal.'

The Avengers were puzzled. Any one else they would have swept aside without remorse or hesitation, but not the widow of the murdered man! To their rude sense of justice it seemed as if she had a right to be heard in a matter in which she had so vital an interest. Field came forward.

'Lynch law is swift and sure,' he said.

'Terribly swift,' answered Kate, 'but why

sure? Is a Vigilance Committee omniscient and infallible?'

'Look a here, Mrs. Morley,' broke in Pete roughly. 'You're the last soul in the town I'd ha' expected to raise your voice for the man that has made you a widow. Now we've fooled with you long enough. Stand back!'

'Ay, clear out; we can't waste the whole night in chin music,' shouted a voice from the crowd.

'Gentlemen, listen to me,' screamed Kate; but she was rudely thrust aside, and her appeal was lost among the hoarse voices of the Vigilantes.

Pat Byrne came forward and drew her away.

'Go home, Mrs. Morley,' he urged. 'Ye're doin' no good here, an' ye'll only get hurt.' He quickly saw that this argument was unavailing, so he went on without pause. 'Ye'll only get them angrier an' do more harm nor good.'

This representation appeared to have some weight.

'I'll go, Mr. Byrne, I'll go—but you'll wait here and save him, won't you?'

'I won't stir from this spot, an' I'll do all I know for him,' asseverated Byrne earnestly.

He led her to the edge of the clearing. 'Now ye'll be home in five minutes, like a good sowl, won't ye?'

The excitement that had hitherto sustained Kate was bringing its reaction.

'He is innocent, I know he is innocent,' she said faintly.

'That's me own opinion,' assented Pat, 'but it's not by prachin' sarmons ye can turn wolves from their prey. Now go!'

'You'll do your best,' persisted Kate.

'I'll do all ye cud do, an' more,' answered Byrne.

She caught his hand and kissed it.

'You are a good man, Mr. Byrne, and mean well. Oh, pray be firm this time.'

'What did she mane by that, I dunno?' soliloquised Pat, as he watched her form vanishing through the chaparral. 'Women is mortial quare ennyhow.'

He shook his head dismally; looked with a puzzled expression at his hand where her lips had rested, and then turned back and joined the group assembled before the church.

CHAPTER X

THE moment he was disembarrassed of Mrs. Morley, Boone faced round on his followers, and there was the sharpness of a military order in his tones as he shouted, 'Fall in!'

The San Pablo Committee of Safety had been working together for some time, and the force showed the rudiments of drill and discipline as they formed in line, and, in accordance with Boone's next order, numbered from right to left.

'Odd files, step forward!' he commanded; and thus, in a moment, without confusion and without the appearance of invidious selection, the band was divided into two equal portions.

'Number one!' he continued, addressing Field, who had taken ground at the extreme right of the line; 'we settled all this below. You know what you have to do?'

Field did not appear to feel enthusiastic over the post assigned to him.

'Yes, I know what I'm to do,' he grumbled, 'but it seems to me it's the most dangerous part.'

'If you're afraid, man, go home,' said the Judge sharply.

'Afraid!' retorted Field, 'I afraid? what an idea!' Then he turned to the line. 'Odd files, follow me; this way, boys.'

And half the Vigilantes, with Field at their head, silently left the clearing and disappeared in the chaparral.

At this moment Byrne, having induced Kate to leave, came back on the ground.

'Look at here, boys,' he said advancing. 'I don't know enny o' ye by rason that ye're masked, an' I don't want to know enny o' ye by rason that thrubble is sure to come out o' this night's work. Now what I'd advise yez all to do is to go home and go to bed, stopping in at the Spread Eagle fer a snifter to keep out the night air; my trate, boys.'

'Mr. Byrne,' answered the Judge, who had listened with some impatience to this address, 'you'll take my advice and mind your own business. This is no child's play.'

Taking no further notice of Mr. Byrne, Boone

stepped up to the church door and knocked on it smartly.

'You may as well speak, Mr. Starkweather,' he said, 'for we know you're there.'

There was a moment's pause and then the light wooden door swung back and Sam Starkweather's burly form appeared in the doorway, which it nearly filled.

'Well, boys,' said the Sheriff, 'I am here, and I'm not here to skulk like a coyote, but to do my duty. Here I am, and now what do you want?'

There was a momentary shrinking back of those who had pressed nearest the door, but Boone stood his ground.

'We want Jack Scott,' he said.

'Oh, you do!' The Sheriff drew from either pocket a revolver, which he deliberately cocked. Then he went on:

'Now, boys, you're all friends of mine, and I'm a friend of yours. You don't want to hurt me, and I'd be sorry to hurt you; but, as for Jack Scott, he's my prisoner and I shall defend him with my life.'

Sheriff Starkweather was one of the most popular men in San Antonio county, and he had

a reputation for determination and entire fearlessness which every one present was familiar with, and which some had seen justified. All respected him and many dreaded him. The result was that the mass of the Vigilantes hung back, and no one seemed to care to try conclusions with the man who stood single-handed between them and their victim.

Boone turned savagely on his followers.

'Up with you, boys,' he shouted. 'Don't make a fool of law and order in San Pablo by this night's work.'

Then he faced the Sheriff again.

'You may as well stand aside, Sam Starkweather. We've nothing for you but goodwill and respect, but you can't save that murderer. It's your duty to try and you've done your duty. Now stand back and get out of our way, for we're bound to have him.'

Starkweather, without turning, spoke back to some one inside the church.

'Scott, I have your word that you will not try to escape and that you will come forward to answer the crime you are charged with.'

'You have,' answered Jack's voice out of the obscurity.

'Then fight for your life, my boy,' said Starkweather, handing him one of the revolvers.

The action was noticed by the Avengers, and roused them to a pitch of frenzy.

'Is that what you call law, Sam Starkweather?' shouted Smith; 'giving a murderer a pistol so he may murder again?'

'All together, boys,' roared the Judge, 'we'll soon have him out.'

The Vigilantes, pistols in hands, and with their eyes shining through their masks, made a rush forward, but halted within a few steps of the porch as the flashes of two revolvers lit up the dusk of the church and gave a glimpse of the two figures standing with levelled weapons in the narrow entrance. No one was injured. The Sheriff, anxious to avoid bloodshed, had instructed Jack to aim high, and the two bullets had passed over the heads of the Avengers. But the attitude of determined resistance had checked them for a moment, and of that moment Starkweather took advantage to stake his immense personal influence against the unruly mob in this desperate game for life.

'Not another step, boys,' he shouted, coming forward to the very edge of the porch and

standing full in the moonlight. 'Not another step! You know well enough that I'm not likely to miss you except on purpose, and the next time I touch trigger I shoot to kill. Silence!' he roared at the full scope of his powerful voice, as a threatening murmur arose from the rear of the band. 'I'm talking now. If you've anything to say when I get through, I'll listen to you. Now, boys, you're decent people most of you, and this is a mad business and there'll be blood spilled before it's ended; for I tell you, you don't touch this man except across my body. Now let's talk sense. Have reason and don't be wild beasts. Your votes elected me Sheriff. You chose me to enforce the laws, and now you ask me to break them. You ask me to prove false to the trust yourselves imposed on me. You ask me, the Sheriff of this county, to surrender the custody of my lawful prisoner. I can't do it; I won't do it; I'll see you all d——d first.'

The Sheriff's rough eloquence was not without a momentary effect, and cries of 'Bully for you, Sam;' 'He talks like a book;' 'I tell you he's sand clar through,' were heard among the men. But the next instant a shrill whistle

sounded from the rear of the church, and the Vigilantes recognised its import and recollected their purpose.

'There he is, boys,' shouted the Judge. 'Have him out.'

And the whole band flung itself on the entrance as one man.

So sudden was the movement, so quick was the transition from a reasonable degree of sympathy to ferocious action, that Starkweather was taken by surprise for a moment. Before he could recover himself and press the trigger on which his finger rested, with a crash of splintering woodwork the rear door was broken down, and the second detachment of the Avengers swept like a whirlwind through the little church. On they came, still carrying the posts and picket rails of the fence which they had converted into battering-rams.

Starkweather and Jack turned to confront the new danger, but they were caught between two fires. Boone and his men charged from the front as Field's gang hurled itself on from the rear. There was a brief confused struggle; a few curses were heard like catches in the labouring breath of the combatants; a few pistol-shots

rang out, and sometimes a groan followed. Then the refluent tide ebbed out through the doorway as Boone drew his men back, and Field's party hustled the prisoner out into the open. It all passed more quickly than words can describe it; and there was the group, terribly suggestive in its picturesqueness. The Vigilantes stood around in various attitudes, panting from their recent exertions, as wild dogs stand and pant when they have run down their prey. Jack was firmly pinioned by the grasp of a dozen rough hands, and gallant Sheriff Starkweather lay where he had fallen, while the thirsty sand lapped up the blood that was flowing from a wound in his temple.

'Are you much hurt, Sam? Speak to me!'

Judge Boone took no notice of the prisoner, but knelt beside the Sheriff's prostrate form and strove to stanch the bleeding. More than half the Vigilantes were grouped around him, shocked, horrified at what they had done, like boys who in starting a bonfire have burned a town.

Not so Jeffries. In the momentary paralysis of the other leaders he again came to the front, and his voice sounded quicker and deeper than

was its wont as he issued his orders. 'Now lively, boys, lively. Run him up!'

Mechanically one of the men uncoiled a riato which he carried and flung the end over the branch of a live oak which projected across the path. Jack Scott saw the dangling noose, and shivered slightly but said nothing. He felt as if the bitterness of death were passed.

But Pat Byrne, who had been an appalled spectator of the rapid scene, found his tongue at last. His time-serving nature was stirred to its depths by the horrors he saw and the worse horrors he imagined. For once in his life he forgot to ask himself how many were on his side and how many ranged against him. His voice rang clear and true, as he stepped forward and grasped the rope.

'Are ye men? What are ye? Oh, stand back; I'm afeared o' none o' ye. Look at poor Sam Starkweather there! a man worth a whole town o' ye, and blush for this night's work.'

Boone looked up, and there was an entire change in his tone and manner as he replied:

'I didn't want to hurt him. He brought it on himself!'

'He done his duty,' cried Byrne indignantly; 'an' if there's another man here can say as much I'd like to see him.'

'Take him down to the hotel, boys, and call the doctor. We've no grudge against Sam, anyway,' said the Judge.

'No, that's true enough,' muttered Pete, and the Sheriff's inanimate body was raised very tenderly and borne by four men, with elaborate precaution against jar or shake, down the road to the village.

'I wonder if he's much hurt,' muttered more than one voice anxiously.

'Small thanks to you and your bloody murderous gang if he's not,' remarked Pat roughly.

'Well, if he hadn't pulled a pistol,' grumbled Smith, with the air of a man who, knowing himself in fault, yet makes a desperate attempt to shift the blame. 'Look at poor Hank's hand, will you?'

He pointed to Dollett, who was engaged in tying up three of his fingers which had been shattered by a bullet. But Hank objected to sympathy, and did not show any desire to be a party to Smith's excuses.

'Rot my hand,' he growled; 'I'd rather have had my whole arm blown off, than any harm should have happened to Sam Starkweather.'

And the feeling expressed by Hank Dollett seemed to be prevalent among the Vigilantes. They spoke in low tones and moved about with a cowed air; and though several men still kept their hands on the prisoner, the mob seemed to lack spirit and leadership.

Many eyes were turned on Judge Boone, but he had seated himself in the porch and remained silent, resting his head on his hand. Evidently he had taken the accident to the Sheriff deeply to heart.

Pat Byrne felt that he was no longer single-handed. Adroit old trimmer that he was, he sniffed the changing tendencies of men's minds, as old sailors sniff the changes in the atmosphere that betoken storm or calm.

'Now tell me, boys,' he said; 'is this going any further? Haven't ye done mischief enough for wan night?'

There was an evident wavering among the Avengers, and Pat proceeded, hooking his arm in that of Smith, and endeavouring to drag him down to the road. 'Come along wid me, Smith,

an' let us see how poor Sam is, an' if they got him home safe.'

It looked for a moment as if Byrne would prevail. There was a shame-faced, downcast look about the men, very different from the arrogant confidence with which they had embarked on the adventure. Their leaders, too, seemed on the point of deserting them, and a very slight impulse would at this moment have turned them from their purpose.

But Pat Byrne's well-meant efforts were not destined to succeed. Once more Haman Jeffries stepped forward and stemmed the current that was slowly setting in favour of the prisoner. The schoolmaster had kept back as long as others acted, but it was plain that he would not suffer the mob, for lack of a leader, to thwart its own purpose.

'And are you going to let this red-handed murderer escape after all?' he demanded. 'This Scott is the real cause of the Sheriff's being shot, and because he has brought on this second crime, are you going to let him escape the consequences of the other? We have begun the work of clearing this town of thieves and murderers. Are we to stop now for the sake of

a few soft words from Pat Byrne, the softest man in it? I don't know how the rest of you feel. I am not to be bluffed so easily.'

Jack had stood silent all this time, with downcast head, seemingly taking no notice of what passed around him. Since he had fallen into the hands of the mob he had felt as a man may be supposed to feel when grasped by the fangs of the tiger, when crushed by the wheels of the locomotive. He was at the mercy of an irresponsible power, not personally antagonistic to himself, but resolved on his death, and by reason of its impersonality the more impossible to resist, the more hopeless to reason with.

Jeffries' speech roused him. Here was individual malice; here was one man's enmity seeking another man's life. Here was an adversary, with every advantage of weapon and position indeed, but still an adversary whom he might encounter in a duel to the death.

Jack raised his head, and the colour flushed into his cheeks. With a violent effort he shook himself loose from the hands that held him, and bounded across to Jeffries. He was seized again on the instant and a rougher grasp on arms

and collar vindicated the vigilance he had eluded. But he had been free for one second, and in that second he had torn the crape mask from the other's forehead and revealed the pale, deeply marked features of Jeffries.

'I thought as much, Haman Jeffries,' cried Jack Scott.

The schoolmaster fell back a step, and a livid scowl passed across his face. Then he caught the swinging noose which still dangled from the limb above his head, and flung it over the neck of Jack, now pinioned and helpless.

'Talk enough and too much,' he yelled. 'Tail on to that rope, boys.'

CHAPTER XI

THE motion and the fresh air partially revived Sheriff Starkweather, but he did not fully recover consciousness for more than an hour. When he came to himself he was in his own bed in the San Pablo House. Dr. Meares was in the room, and Carrie Van Zandt, very pale and frightened, but obviously relieved by his recognition of her, was seated at the bedside. With the exception of a little weakness and a violent headache, Sam felt none the worse of his adventure. The wound, so the doctor assured him, was in itself trifling. He had been struck on the head by a glancing ball and stunned, and twenty-four hours' rest would make him as well as ever.

Upon learning this, the Sheriff wanted to get up at once, but Dr. Meares would not hear of it. He insisted on absolute quiet, and remarked

that now the patient was conscious he should send Carrie away. Thereupon the Sheriff, having attempted to sit up, and having found that he could scarcely raise his head from the pillow, and having further ascertained that he had been unconscious for nearly an hour, was compelled to make a virtue of necessity and stay where he was. Indeed, there was nothing of pressing importance to call him forth. No man knew better than Sam Starkweather that there was no use in hurrying to the assistance of a man who had fallen into the hands of the Vigilantes an hour ago.

'Poor Jack won't miss me now,' he muttered with a sigh. 'He was a good fellow and I did what I could for him; but, Lord, how my head does ache!'

Perhaps Starkweather would have felt more grief, though it is doubtful if he would have shown more emotion, had not weakness and loss of blood lulled his senses in a sort of stupor, and weighed on his eyelids with irresistible drowsiness.

Before dropping off to sleep, however, he thought of Lucy, and recollecting that he had sent her up to Morley's house he began to fear

for the effects which the events of the night might have on his daughter. He confided his doubts to Carrie, and she at once volunteered to go up to the Plateau and accompany Lucy home, or if that were impossible, at least to remain with her till morning.

'Can you, Carrie, do you think?' asked the Sheriff doubtfully.

'Why not?' answered the girl briskly. 'It's the thing I would like best to do, now that I've not got to worry about you any more.'

'You're a good little girl,' said Starkweather, smiling feebly. 'It's most a pity you wasn't born in California, but you'll do as you are. But aren't you scared?'

'Not a bit,' answered Miss Van Zandt resolutely. 'I won't have Lucy left alone to-night for more than I can tell you.'

'The men will be all scattered by this time,' he went on with a sigh, 'and I don't think you'll meet anyone.' Suddenly he broke off and resumed again with a startling change of manner and emphasis:

'No, by Cripus, you mustn't go. You mustn't stir out of this house this night.'

He had suddenly thought of the ghastly

burden which, he doubted not, was now hanging from one of the trees near the church. What a spectacle for a timid girl to encounter among the lonely woods at midnight!

'Why mustn't I go, Mr. Starkweather?' inquired Carrie, surprised at this sudden change of purpose.

'Because you mustn't; that's enough. Now mind me, like a good girl. Lucy will do very well till morning. Mrs. Morley's with her.'

Before Carrie could reply, Dr. Meares interposed and ordered her out of the room. Mr. Starkweather must sleep, he said; he was going to darken the chamber and leave the patient for the night.

So Carrie was driven away, and she immediately went to her own apartment to prepare for her excursion. She had no idea of abandoning her intention of visiting Lucy on account of Mr. Starkweather's unexplained prohibition, which Miss Van Zandt was inclined to regard as a whim of his weakened brain.

She put on a hat and veil, and wrapped her trim little figure in a shawl. Carrie was a girl who would have tried to look her best even if she had been dressing for a promenade on a

desert island where she could not reckon on so much as a crow for a spectator. She liked to look her best, not only in the eyes of other people, but also in her own. So she drew on her gloves and even took a parasol in her hand. This last she was conscious was wholly superfluous, but she carried it from habit. As she remarked to herself, 'It's something to fiddle with and keep the starlight off.'

So equipped, Carrie stole quietly down through the slumbering hotel, and opening the door stepped out on the Plaza into the moonlight. At the same moment a mustang cantered round the corner, appearing with such suddenness that Carrie drew back with a little scream. The rider, a good-looking young fellow of thirty-two or three, with dark curly hair and a handsome brown beard, drew rein sharply, uttering a word of apology. Then he bent down from the saddle and looked hard at the girl; then he dismounted and, pulling off his soft felt hat with one hand, advanced, extending the other, with an air of mingled delight and perplexity on his pleasant sun-burned face.

'Why, Miss Van Zandt, is it possible?' he said.

'It's Mr. Ruggles,' she cried, frankly grasping the outstretched hand. 'I'm awfully glad to see you, but what on earth brings you to San Pablo at this time of night?'

'The public thirst for information on viticulture,' answered Ruggles. 'I'm here to write up the vineyards. But may I ask if Miss Van Zandt has contracted the habit of taking moonlight walks after midnight?'

Then Carrie told him in a few words the principal events of the day, so far as she understood them. She had no conception of the reality and extent of Jack Scott's danger, but she knew that there had been an attempt to seize him, and that Sheriff Starkweather had been hurt in the struggle. Where Jack was now she had no idea, but Ruggles' brow contracted as he listened, and he was obviously uneasy.

'And you're going up to see your friend, Miss Starkweather,' he said. 'Very well, I'll go with you.'

'Oh, will you?' she cried eagerly. 'I'm so glad.'

'I wouldn't have you go alone for the world,' he answered. 'When a place like this climbs

up on its ear, it's apt to be pretty bad times all round.'

He roused a sleepy hostler and sent the horse to the stable. Then he offered Miss Van Zandt his arm.

'It seems quiet enough now,' he remarked, glancing round the Plaza, which slept peacefully under the moonlight. 'How far is it to this place?'

'Oh, half a mile or so, I suppose,' answered Carrie; and the two bent their steps toward the chaparral which had been the scene of such exciting events during the last few hours.

'Poor Dick Morley!' muttered Ruggles. 'He was a cousin of mine, you know, though I never saw him but once, and that was only for a few minutes.'

'Was he your cousin?' inquired Carrie. 'I didn't know. How terribly you must feel!'

'It's a very shocking thing,' he answered; 'but I confess I feel worse about Jack Scott. I was very fond of that young fellow.'

'And you've known him too?' commented the girl, surprised at her companion's range of acquaintance.

'Known isn't the word; we were room-mates in 'Frisco two years ago,' he replied.

'Well, I'm real glad you've come,' she said heartily. 'Certainly you are the very last person I should have expected to meet in a place like this.'

'Am I?' he replied with a smile. 'I certainly did not expect to meet you at this hour of the night. I knew you were in San Antonio, of course——'

'Oh, you knew I was in San Antonio,' she echoed in some surprise.

Jimmy Ruggles seemed disconcerted for a moment. He had evidently said more than he intended.

'Well, of course I knew you were somewhere in this part of the world,' he hesitated. 'Don't you recollect that I met you on the stage at Orvietas?'

'Why, of course you did,' answered Carrie. 'What a ramshackle old conveyance that Orvietas stage is, isn't it? But you Californians are the most primitive people.'

'We Californians are a very peculiar race in your eyes, Miss Van Zandt,' remarked Ruggles with a smile. 'Now really and truly

do you think we differ very much from you New Yorkers?'

'What a question!' retorted Carrie. 'Of course you do. It may be the glorious climate or it may be specie payments, but you are certainly different.'

'And do you regard me as a fair specimen of the average Californian?' he asked.

'There you go again,' returned Carrie. 'You never can answer a question but you can always ask one.'

'And you haven't answered,' he persisted.

'I think,' said Carrie, speaking with deliberation, 'that you are about as typical a specimen of the Californian as I have met on my travels. The city Californian, I mean, as distinct from the rural variety. Perhaps I should rather say the San Franciscan.'

Ruggles laughed. 'Well, Miss Van Zandt, it's a compliment to be taken as a type, so I won't dispute you.'

So they beguiled the way and their own graver thoughts with light conversation, but it was evident that Ruggles was uneasy, and though he strove not to alarm his companion, he could not forbear a question or two which

showed that his thoughts were busy with the possibilities of Jack Scott's fate, and the talk insensibly came round to him. Carrie seemed to have unaccountably missed the real peril which threatened the young man, and Ruggles was careful not to put his own misgivings into words.

They had been walking thus for about an hour when Ruggles suddenly remarked:

'You must have strangely under-estimated the distance to my cousin's house, Miss Van Zandt. We have travelled at least three miles since we left the village.'

'Oh dear,' cried Carrie, halting and gazing round her in perplexity. 'I must have missed the way. I never was there but once, and everything looks so different at night. How stupid of me!'

'Look around and see if you can get your bearings,' said Ruggles. 'There's an odd-looking hill in front of us. Do you know that?'

'No,' answered Carrie helplessly, 'I don't know anything. Oh, what are we to do?'

'It's nothing to fret about,' remarked Ruggles reassuringly. 'We've taken the wrong turning, that's all. I noticed the place where

we branched off, about two miles below. We've nothing to do but go back on our tracks.'

'It's very provoking, certainly,' said Carrie; 'and I don't feel sure now if I've taken the first step right.'

'That's serious, if you like,' answered Ruggles lightly. 'Let us take a look.'

They were on a narrow road winding along the edge of a succession of foot hills, which bounded it to the north and east. These hills were terraced on their lower slopes, and laid out in parallel lines of cultivation. The chaparral was behind, and the night breeze rustled through the long lines of carefully-staked vines.

'That's a vineyard, anyhow,' remarked Ruggles; 'and a big one. Now some one must live in or near that, and we'll rout them up and find out just where we are.'

A boy, or a man of small stature, peeped round a bush that grew on the roadside. He saw the figures of the two wanderers at the same moment that Ruggles detected him, and he drew back and seemed about to take to his heels.

'Here, hold on! No one's going to hurt you,' shouted Jimmy. 'Come here a minute.'

The figure hesitated, and Ruggles called again in reassuring tones.

'We've lost our way. Come and put us in the road that leads to Morley's house, and I'll give you a quarter.'

The stranger advanced toward them, though still hesitating.

'What's the man afraid of?' muttered Ruggles. 'He's a greaser or a dago, and a little one at that. 'S'accommodi, amigo,' he shouted; 'can't you show us the way to Morley's?'

'Si, señor,' answered the Mexican, coming forward more alertly. He was a man of about thirty, with restless black eyes, and a complexion of the colour of a new saddle. He was dressed in full native costume, with gaily decorated calzoneros, and a brightly coloured manga disposed not unpicturesquely round his shoulders. His boots were adorned with long brass spurs, and he pulled off his flapping sombrero with a chivalrous air when he saw the lady.

Ruggles realised that his offer of a quarter had been no inducement.

'You wish to go to Morley's, caballero,' said the stranger, speaking in very intelligible English. 'Bueno, we go,' and he waved his hand with a

gesture of invitation toward the road along which they had come.

'So you see, Miss Van Zandt,' said Ruggles cheerfully, 'we have only overshot our mark.'

'Señor,' asked the Mexican, after they had proceeded a few paces in silence. 'Ees it you have read any novedades of Señor Yascott?'

'Jack Scott, do you mean?' inquired Ruggles. 'No, we have heard nothing, but we hope to learn something at Morley's.'

'I would like go,' said the Mexican, 'but it ees not moocha safe. Eef they catch me, they swear they skin me—but Carrambo, I will go. Señor Yascott saved me from the feathers and the tar; Señor Yascott ees my friend; Señor Yascott ees in trouble; I will go.'

And boldly stepping in advance of the party the little Mexican led Miss Van Zandt and Mr. Ruggles at a round pace down the narrow vineyard path toward the chaparral.

CHAPTER XII

THE Judge came listlessly forward as half a dozen men, in obedience to the order of the schoolmaster, grasped the rope. The noose was around Jack Scott's neck; a movement, a sign was all that was needed to gibbet him to the branch overhead; but the spirit of resistance which Haman Jeffries' direct attack had infused into the young man had not died out.

'Are you the leader of this gang?' he asked, fixing Jeffries with his flaming eyes as the latter nervously endeavoured to readjust his mask.

'No,' said Boone, 'I'm the leader.' He spoke in an indifferent, perfunctory way, as if he had lost all interest in the proceedings; but added with a little more animation, 'There's no use your fighting over it, Jack Scott. Your time has come.'

'And it's all too long coming,' muttered

Smith. Since Sheriff Starkweather had fallen, the business had become distasteful to almost every one on the ground. They persisted in it from a blind, dogged idea of duty.

The men who held the rope braced their muscles and looked toward their leader for the signal. He raised his hand to give it.

'Stop,' shouted Jack. 'Won't you grant me a moment?'

'Not a second,' cried Jeffries, savagely.

'Ah, thin, black burnin' shame on ye; whoever sed thim words,' exclaimed Pat Byrne.

Judge Boone did not give the signal.

'Ay, for shame!' he echoed with a glance in the direction of Jeffries. 'If the lad has a mind to confess——'

'Ay, ay,' interrupted Field in a tone of banter. 'Let him make his last dying speech and confession.'

Pat Byrne shot a wrathful glance at the speaker; and anyone who could have looked into the worthy Irishman's mind at the moment, might have informed Foxy Field that his incumbency of the editorial chair of the 'Independent' would not be of long duration.

'I have nothing to confess,' said Jack boldly,

and, turning to one of the men who was about to pinion his arms with a piece of rope, he added, 'You needn't tie me. I have no thought of resistance.'

'There, he won't confess!' exclaimed the schoolmaster. 'Make an end of him.'

This time Pat Byrne detected the quarter whence the malevolent interruption came.

'Ham Jeffries,' he cried, 'you're a blood-thirsty savage.'

Judge Boone still hesitated to give the fatal order.

'You can have a moment for a prayer, if you can think of one,' he said.

Scott had by this time recovered from the first numbing effects of the shock that had stricken him speechless, and well nigh will-less, when he had first fallen into the hands of the mob. He was a brave young fellow, and his courage rose with the extremity of the danger. The unaccountable animosity of Jeffries acted as a stimulus, and though he realised that his case was desperate, he resolved to make a final appeal and not yield life till every means had been tried.

He braced himself firmly on his feet, and, as

his arms were still at liberty, he grasped the noose around his neck with one hand as a precaution against any sudden impulse that might seize the men who held the rope.

'I don't think the time has come for me to say my last prayer,' he began, 'and I'll tell you why. I know most of you, and you all know me. Yesterday, I think any one of you would have said that I was the last man in San Pablo likely to stand in the position I occupy now. I would have said so myself. In spite of these masks you wear, and though you have been led away by appearances to believe me guilty, and by passion to act on your belief, I know you are too just, too generous, too fairly and squarely American, to kill me without giving me a chance to say a word in my own defence.'

'Ay, Jack, ay, we'll hear you,' shouted Byrne encouragingly.

Jeffries turned on him savagely.

'Who are you? I don't recognise you on this committee, and I don't want to fool away the whole night here.'

'It is better to fool away a few hours,' retorted Jack, 'than to fool away the life of an innocent man. I recognise you as my enemy,

Haman Jeffries; why, I do not know, for I have never consciously wronged you in word or deed. But you are not alone in this matter. I appeal to my fellow-townsmen around me—my friends, many of them—to hear me say a few words in my own behalf, and then, if they wish, they can give the word and see me die; and I trust I shall face Death like——'

'Like the Hero of San Pablo,' interrupted Byrne enthusiastically. 'The Hero of San Pablo, that's what yez used to call him no later nor a few hours ago. For very shame's sake, boys, yez can't refuse to hear what he has to say for himself.'

'We will hear him,' said Boone curtly. 'It isn't often that Judge Lynch grants a stay of proceedings, but if Jack Scott has anything to say for himself, I think, boys, we can afford to let him say it.'

There was a chorus of assent from the band, unanimous save for an uncompromising negative from the schoolmaster. Jack addressed his next words to him directly.

'Thank you, Haman Jeffries. For the clever man I have always thought you, you show your hand plainly enough. Now, gentlemen, I have

but a few words to say, and I won't detain you long. 'I've had no hand in Dick Morley's death. I'm as innocent of the crime as any of you.'

'That's thin,' interrupted Every-Day Pete.

'Thin's no name for it,' chimed in Smith. 'I've seen many a man hung and not one of them but was ready to swear he was as innocent as a baby.'

'Do you think I'd lie to you?' demanded Jack. 'I don't expect that what I've told you is going to save my life, and if it wasn't the truth I shouldn't want it to. You've all known me long enough to be pretty sure I'm not so fond of lying as to tell one here for nothing. What I say, I say because it is God's truth. I never shot Dick Morley.'

The young man's solemn denial in the very face of the grave that yawned for him seemed to have an effect on some of the men. Various little instances of his candour and straightforward manliness were whispered from one to the other, and Hank Dollett crystallised the opinion of many present in one sentence:

'Jack Scott's a pretty square man.'

But the other minds were dwelling on the weight of the evidence against him.

'I never knowed Jack Scott to tell a lie in my life,' remarked Boone; 'but he's told one now.'

Scott overheard and contradicted him like a flash.

'I have told the truth,' he cried passionately. 'What! do you suppose I'm afraid of death? When all's said and done, it's only a wrench and it's over. It must come to all of us sooner or later. I shall not say I want to die now. Life is just as sweet to me as it is to any of you, and sweeter to me this night than ever it was before.'

His eyes wandered to the church porch, and his voice broke a little as he thought of Lucy; but he concluded steadily:

'I'm not lying in the vain hope of saving my life, and I'm not afraid of death.'

'Thrue for ye,' shouted Pat. 'The man that plunged through that surf last spring and saved a shipwrecked crew can't be much of a coward, can he, boys?'

The allusion told. Men glanced from one to the other, and seemed to recognise the discrepancy between a heroic deed and the cowardly murder of which Jack Scott was accused. But Boone was still intent on the evidence, to his

mind unanswerable, and he brought back the scattered thoughts of his band with a word.

'I'm not denying that Jack Scott's a brave man, and what he done below on the beach is what few men would do; but, all the same, he's murdered a man.'

Thus brought back to the matter in hand, the fickle mob veered again. The scene on Morley's Plateau recurred to the men's minds, and they ran over the various points of the incriminating evidence. Jack, contesting the ground inch by inch, grappled with each apparent proof as it was presented.

'The quarrel was nothing but a few hot words,' he argued. 'You have all had the like with Dick Morley. Poor fellow! his temper was none of the easiest. Does a man murder another because of a hasty word? As for the pistol, mine though it be, it was levelled not by me but by some enemy of Dick's.'

'He never had any enemy but whiskey,' interrupted Smith.

'There you are wrong,' retorted Jack. 'He had. Every man here knows—the poor fellow boasted of it all morning—that there was an attempt made upon Dick Morley's life last night.

The man who failed then renewed his attempt to-day, and the second time he succeeded. Isn't that the natural supposition? And that is the man you've got to find, and the man you would be trying to find if you hadn't run off with the notion that because my pistol probably shot him —I say probably, because even that isn't certain —that therefore my hand and no other pulled the trigger. I think it more likely that the man who tried to stab him yesterday shot him to-day. You remember Dick Morley's boast that he had a struggle with his assassin—that he beat him off, wounding him in the arm, though the night was too dark for recognition. I say that the man who shot Dick Morley to-day bears Dick Morley's mark on his arm. There are my arms, gentlemen'—Jack rolled up his sleeves as he spoke—'there are my arms; if you find scratch or scar on them, I have no more to say.'

All pressed forward to look, but fell back, feeling foolish as, Jeffries sneered:

'Very fine! If he didn't know his arms were clean, do you think he'd be ass enough to show them?'

Hank was impressed with Jack's argument, however.

'What do you think, Smith? Maybe we're making a mistake after all?' he asked uneasily.

'Mistake! How can we?' rejoined Smith. 'Likely enough there were two of them in the job, and the other one got cut.'

'Now we come to the pistol,' resumed Jack. 'It was mine, but it hadn't been in my possession for two days. Morley was cleaning it for me, and not an hour before his death he told me he had given it to Mr. Jeffries to return to me. That pistol I never received.'

'Dick Morley didn't tell the truth, or more likely you're lying now. He never gave me the pistol.'

This positive denial from the schoolmaster had much weight with those who heard it, for Jeffries was universally regarded as an upright, respectable man, although somewhat peculiar in his views. Jack did not attempt to controvert the statement. 'Be it so,' he said. 'Mr. Jeffries denies having received the pistol. So do I. I swear to you, gentlemen, I saw it for the first time to-day in the hands of the Sheriff.'

The reference to Starkweather renewed all the Judge's perturbation.

'It's a bad job, that about Sam,' he remarked to Byrne. 'I wonder how he is.'

Pat, who had been alternately exalted and depressed according to the effect which his young friend's arguments appeared to produce, was now gloomy and despondent.

'It's a bad night's work all through,' he replied. 'I wish it was over.'

'Now, gentlemen, here is my position,' resumed Jack. 'I am helpless in your hands. You believe I committed this murder—a dastardly crime which my very soul abhors.'

He paused for a token of assent, but none came.

'I see that no words of mine can convince you,' he went on, 'and your short and speedy vengeance deprives me of all chance of acting. But, gentlemen, if you hang me, you do not avenge the murder. The murderer will still live, and it is my belief that he is in this very town now—perhaps the coward face is growing pale behind one of those masks as he listens to me. If I had a few days I believe I could lay my hands on him. A few days—why should I ask so much?—a few hours will suffice, for whether I succeed or fail, the issue is in the

hands of Heaven. Gentlemen, give me twenty-four hours, and I will undertake to produce the real murderer, or, failing that, to submit myself without a word to the sentence your justice shall pronounce.'

This proposition took every one by surprise.

'What do you mean?' exclaimed the Judge. 'If we let you go for twenty-four hours——'

'He will be in 'Frisco before the time is up,' interrupted Jeffries.

'I shall not stir from San Pablo,' asseverated Jack. 'I shall use the time to unmask the real villain. If I succeed—well; if I fail, your vengeance will not cool for twenty-four hours' waiting.'

'You will not try to escape—or to secure assistance?' said the Judge.

'So help me, God, I will do neither,' answered Jack. 'And what assistance could I procure?' Have we railroads in San Antonio county to bring help to me, even if I knew where to send for it?'

'By the Lord Harry, I believe him,' shouted Hank, slapping his thigh with a resounding blow.

'Gentlemen,' cried Pat eagerly, 'this is

honest talk, or I never heard honest talk in all me days. Give the boy a chance for his life, an' a chance to save yez all from doin' what ye'll regrit to yer dyin' day, if all he says is true.'

Boone seemed strongly inclined to yield.

'If you fail to find the murderer,' he said.

'If before this time to-morrow night,' answered Jack, solemnly, 'I fail to find the real criminal, then I pledge you my word and honour I will surrender myself to you just as I stand now.'

'What do you say, boys?' inquired Boone, turning to the others.

Jeffries stepped forward as if to protest, and then, recognising that the tide was turning, bit his lips and remained silent.

The romantic idea of such a parole pleased the impulsive villagers. Scarcely one of them doubted but that Jack Scott would redeem his pledge.

'He's a white man,' said one.

'He never told a lie in his life,' said another.

'Suppose he did shoot Drunken Dick itself,' added a third.

And then a general cry went up from the band, all willing to make some reparation to

Mr. Starkweather for the injuries—how grave they might be no man there as yet knew—which he had sustained at their hands.

'Yes, yes, his word's good; we'll trust him.'

'Well, Jack Scott,' said Boone, obviously relieved at the issue, 'the sense of this committee is, that you be given a show, and if so be that you can find the murderer and prove your innocence, I, for one, will be glad of it. But—' the speaker stopped and glanced at his watch—'it's now twenty minutes past eleven—say half-past. If by half-past eleven to-morrow night, you don't show up—either with the murderer or without him, any man that finds you shall shoot you on sight and the Committee of Safety will hold him blameless.'

'That is understood,' answered Jack, flinging the rope from him and stepping forth a free man. 'I have been close to death to-night, and I've seen the worst of him. At half-past eleven to-morrow night at this spot.'

'No, not here,' answered Boone, quickly. 'We've had trouble enough here—and it isn't decent at the church door—besides, poor Sam. No; let it be at Lone Pine Knob; a nice quiet place. There'll be no interruption there.'

'So be it,' exclaimed Jack. 'To-morrow night at Lone Pine Knob.'

He turned quickly to look for Jeffries, but Jeffries had already left the ground, and the men were trooping back by twos and threes toward the town. Byrne was anxious for Jack to accompany him, but the young man declined.

'No, Mr. Byrne,' he said, 'I've a busy twenty-four hours before me, and I'd rather be alone to think out my plans.'

So the Hon. Pat returned to San Pablo, leaving Jack Scott standing under the oak which had so nearly been his gallows tree.

CHAPTER XIII

THE hours passed anxiously for Kate Morley and Lucy Starkweather, seated together among the varied stock of Kate's little general store in the house on the Plateau. They kept the window open, and listened nervously for any sounds that might reach them from below to indicate how things sped with their friends in the church. Mr. Starkweather's emphatic injunction prevented either of them from venturing down the road to reconnoitre, and until Kate's return after her unavailing intercession with the leaders of the Vigilantes, Lucy had still hoped that nothing would occur to betray the interruption of her father's flight from San Pablo. The news that Kate brought forced her to fear the worst, and thenceforward the two women sat in the dimly lighted room, straining eyes and ears in the direction of the village. But they neither saw nor heard anything. Such breeze as there was

blew down the ravine, and no sounds of the conflict at the church reached them.

Kate had some reliance on Mr. Byrne's promise, and as the time passed without event her confidence increased and Lucy grew more composed. It seemed to them impossible that any collision between the Committee and the Sheriff could occur so close at hand without their hearing it.

So the leaden-footed moments passed and grew into hours, which seemed so long to the two watchers—they had no time-piece at hand—that they fancied the dawn must be near. But the Plateau was still bathed in cold white light, though the lengthening shadows of the trees showed that the moon was sinking. At length the orb of night was lost behind the chaparral, and the women drew closer together as they looked out on the dim landscape.

'Is there no sign of dawn yet?' asked Lucy wearily.

'None,' replied Kate. 'It is dark, all dark; like my life,' she added in lower tones and with a shuddering sigh.

Lucy rose and wrapped a shawl round Mrs. Morley's shoulders.

'You are cold, dear,' she said kindly. 'It has been a long night for you, but it will soon be over.'

Kate held her hand for a moment. 'And you are sharing its weary watches with me,' she said. 'You are very good to me.'

'I could not have slept if I had gone home,' answered Lucy. 'I am glad to have some one to sit with.'

'Of course,' replied Kate in a constrained voice; 'the thought of Mr. Scott's peril would have kept you awake. Tell me, Miss Starkweather,' she asked suddenly; 'do you love him?'

Lucy withdrew her hand, and looked at her companion with a pained, questioning gaze.

'No, no,' went on Kate impetuously, 'don't be angry; you need not answer me. Why should I have asked you such a question as that? As if it could be any business of mine. I must be losing my wits, I think.'

'I do not see why I should make any secret of it,' said Lucy after a pause. 'Jack is very, very dear to me.'

'Ah, no wonder,' sighed Kate. 'And he loves you?'

'He told me so,' replied Lucy, 'and I told him all that was in my heart—oh, my God, if I should never see him again!'

She broke down and covered her face with her hands, while a storm of sobs shook her slight figure.

Very tenderly Kate Morley drew Lucy toward her, and soothed and quieted the weeping girl, pouring words of hope into her ear, until Kate herself felt her own confidence gaining strength from the food it supplied to another. Presently Lucy raised her head.

'How weak and selfish I am,' she cried, 'giving way like this, when I ought to be cheering you and helping you to bear up!'

'Don't think of me, Miss Starkweather,' answered Kate. 'I am used to trouble and anxiety.'

'Indeed you have had enough of both,' murmured Lucy with ready sympathy.

'Don't think of me,' repeated Kate. 'My life is ended.'

'Oh, don't say that,' cried Lucy. 'It sounds so lost and wicked. What do you mean?'

'I feel as a wounded animal must feel when he crawls into some obscure hole to die. This

place has grown hateful to me. I never had much happiness here, and now a blight seems to have fallen on it. But I shall soon be far away —thank Heaven for that!'

'Where do you think of going?' inquired Lucy.

'Back to the States,' answered Kate, 'back to my old work. I shall be less miserable there —and very likely it will all come to an end soon. That is my best hope.'

'How bitterly you speak!' said Lucy.

'Do I? I didn't mean to pain you. You must forgive me,' answered Kate with a sigh.

'You speak of going back to your old work. You were a nurse in the hospitals, were you not?' inquired Lucy.

'I was,' replied Kate, 'and I was wrong to leave them. I was some use there. But I can go back. It was all arranged before my husband—before he died. Come, let us be more cheerful. You will have good news in the morning, I hope.'

'Oh, I pray that I may,' uttered Lucy fervently.

'And Mr. Scott's innocence will be established,

and you will be married, you two, and all will be gaiety and happiness.'

'Oh, don't talk like that,' whispered Lucy, blushing and trembling between hope and fear.

Kate rose, and opening the door stepped out on the verandah.

'Not as much as a streak of grey in the east,' she said wearily. 'This night is certainly unnaturally long.'

'Perhaps you could sleep for an hour, Mrs. Morley, if you lay down,' suggested Lucy. 'You must be quite worn out.'

Kate did not seem to hear. She was bending forward over the railing of the verandah and sending a searching glance down the chaparral path. She fancied she saw a figure approaching through the uncertain glimmer that the moon had left. Every sense on the alert, she watched and listened. She was not mistaken. A tall, erect form emerged from the shadow and came straight toward the house.

Kate lingered a moment till she could assure herself of the identity of the new comer. She lingered yet a moment longer, and a brief, fierce combat raged in her bosom, but she gained the

victory without making any outward sign. Re-entering the house, she replied briefly to Lucy's suggestion.

'Thank you, dear, I think I will lie down for a little.'

She passed on into the inner room, closing the door behind her. The next moment a quick light step sounded on the wooden steps of the verandah, and Jack Scott entered.

Lucy rose and threw herself into his arms with a low, glad cry.

'Oh, you are here! You have come back! You are safe, you are free,' she murmured in her incoherent joy. 'Speak to me, Jack; you are free, you are safe—all this horror is over and done with?'

He held her to his breast and kissed her tenderly.

'Yes, Lucy, I am free, I am safe,' he answered, but there was a constraint in his tone which her ear was quick to catch.

'What has happened? Tell me everything!' Then her face grew white and she shrank back. 'Where is my father?' she asked.

'Don't be frightened, Lucy. I have just

been down to the hotel to inquire. He is asleep and will probably be all right to-morrow.'

'He has been hurt?' she gasped breathlessly.

'Ah, you have not heard,' he answered. 'They attacked the church and he was wounded —but very slightly, Lucy; upon my word, very slightly. He behaved like a hero and saved my life.'

'Let me go to him,' said the girl. 'I must see him at once.'

'Darling, it is impossible,' replied Jack. 'He is asleep and must not be disturbed. But you shall see him in the morning, and indeed, Lucy, he is in no danger.'

Scott spoke with a touch of bitterness. At the hotel he had learned where Lucy was passing the night, and he had come straight to see her. It was a little disappointing to find her so wrapped up in her father that she had no anxiety to spare for the much graver peril in which he stood. But he soon remembered that Lucy knew nothing of what had passed; and that, seeing him free and uninjured, her quick affection sprang startled to the news that her father was lying wounded.

She accepted Scott's assurance, however, and inquired with lively interest into the circumstances of his liberation, and when he explained that he was still a prisoner, though fettered with a looser chain, he had no reason to complain of coldness or lack of interest on the part of the girl he loved.

'To-morrow night,' she whispered, her eyes dilated with horror. 'Oh, Jack, how can you hope to find the murderer?'

'I dare not hope; I can only do my best, and trust in God,' he answered.

'If you had asked for a week!'

'They would not have given it,' he replied; 'the reprieve was narrowly won as it was. They would not have granted an hour longer lest the Sheriff should use the time to procure assistance.'

'May he not do so still?' she asked.

'How? Where would you look for help in this brief time?' answered Jack, 'and half that time will have gone before he will learn what has passed. If it were anywhere else but here —no telegraph, no railway, and the whole neighbourhood in sympathy with the Committee of Safety—which I can scarcely wonder at,

considering what the county has been in the past.'

'Then, Jack,' said Lucy resolutely, 'there is only one thing to do.'

'What?' he asked eagerly.

'Take one of Mr. Byrne's teams, he will let you have it, and drive over the mountains to Lacuna.'

'Lucy!' he cried, startled at the daring proposition.

'You can take the train there and go on to San Francisco,' she pursued.

'I have plighted my solemn word to those men,' he said slowly. 'Would you have me break it?'

'Those men! What are they?' she exclaimed impetuously; 'they are assassins thirsting for your life. They have defied the law and put it aside. They will have your blood as they have nearly had my father's.'

'They gave me my life, trusting in my honour.'

'Your life is your own,' cried the girl.

Jack shook his head sadly, but Lucy went on undaunted:

'Yes, it is. You are bound to protect it, you

would defend it by force if you could. Since that is impossible, save it by flight. Jack, Jack, don't look so set and resolute. You will live, you must live, for my sake.'

'Oh, dearest, that would be a sweet reward,' he said, drawing her close to him. 'You tempt me sorely. A few hours and I might be out of their reach——'

'Yes, yes,' she interrupted impulsively, springing to her feet. Jack went on:

'To live happily with you.'

'Oh, so happily,' she murmured.

'And everyone here would be confirmed in the belief that I am the murderer.'

'What matter what they think? We should be happy, and we would forget all these horrors.'

'They would call me a coward and a liar,' he persisted. 'They believed in me, I cannot forget that. In a question of life and death there are few men whose word would be taken by a mob, but they took mine. No, Lucy; I cannot do it. I have these few hours before me, and with Heaven's help I shall find the murderer.'

The girl drew back bitterly disappointed.

'Then you will stay?' she said.

'Lucy, it is not you, who love me, who would have me go.'

She lifted her beautiful dark eyes, all swimming with tears, to his face.

'You break my heart, Jack,' she whispered, 'but I love you the better for it.'

CHAPTER XIV

A SHARP knock at the open door caused the lovers to start asunder, and in reply to Lucy's timid 'Come in' Juan Estudillo entered, followed by Miss Van Zandt and Jimmy Ruggles.

Carrie went straight to her friend, while a warm greeting passed between Scott and Ruggles. The Mexican, unnoticed, remained near the door.

'What brings you here, old man?' asked Jack with a hearty clasp of the hand.

'Never mind about me,' replied Ruggles. 'Tell us about yourself. From what I have heard, I hardly hoped to find you with a whole skin.'

Jack rapidly recounted the scenes that had passed at the church, and he had an attentive audience, for Kate Morley had come out on hearing the strange voices in the store.

Mr. Ruggles had met his cousin's wife, and

in a few words he recalled himself to her recollection, and offered her his condolences on her recent loss. Then he returned to Scott, and resumed the important discussion as to the best course for the young man to pursue.

'You are fully determined not to make a bolt for it, then?' asked Jimmy.

Lucy answered for Jack with a decided negative, and he acknowledged her spirited reply with a grateful glance.

'No,' he said. 'I must stay here and see the matter through. That point is settled past question.'

'You must find the real murderer, then,' cried Carrie. 'Have you any clue?'

'Scarcely any—none at all, I may say,' answered Jack despondently.

'I think I have,' said Kate, coming quietly forward.

There was a general exclamation of surprise.

'You! Is it possible?' cried Jack eagerly.

'I think I know the man who shot my husband,' continued Kate in the same even tone.

'Speak, Mrs. Morley, for mercy's sake,' cried Jack.

'It is only a vague suspicion,' she went on,

'but it is something to work on while we are all blindly groping in the dark.'

'What is it?' asked Lucy eagerly.

'My husband told you he gave your pistol to Jeffries?' inquired Kate, addressing Scott.

'He told me so—yes,' replied the young man.

'I believe he did so. The pistol was in his hands just before Jeffries came. I went into the house, and I don't remember seeing it again.'

'Jeffries denies it positively,' mused Jack.

'He naturally would, if we assume him to be the murderer,' remarked Lucy.

'Jeffries!' said Jack. 'I can't believe it of him. He dislikes me, I know, and he has shown himself my enemy to-night; but he is a kind-hearted man in general. The children idolise him. They say that he believes in ghosts and dreams. He wouldn't have the nerve to commit a murder.'

'I used to know something about a Jeffries once, whom that description would fit,' broke in Ruggles. 'What is his other name?'

'Haman,' replied Jack.

'Haman Jeffries! That's the man,' said the journalist. 'A dangerous crank, isn't he?'

'He is odd, I believe,' assented Scott. 'He believes in predestination and has a turn for spiritualism.'

'He lectured on "Fate and Freewill" in 'Frisco three or four years ago, and I had to report the wild whirling thing. He was queer enough, but not actually insane, I fancied. And yet he spoke of a man's right to remove any object from his path to heaven and to happiness, and I thought then how like he was to that man in Massachusetts who offered up his two children as a sacrifice.'

Carrie drew back with a little gesture of repulsion, but Ruggles did not notice her.

'If therewerea motive,' he mused; 'he certainly is not mad enough to act without a motive.'

'He had a motive,' said Kate; 'what men call a strong motive.'

'What was it?' inquired Lucy.

'I had rather not say what it was,' answered the widow, 'but I know it existed.'

Ruggles glanced sharply at Kate, and seemed inclined to press the question, but he forbore.

'Assume the motive, then,' he said, 'and your

suspicion is strengthened; but it is still no more than mere suspicion.'

'There is a way to enlarge this suspicion into certainty or else resolve it into nothing,' Jack said.

There was a tone of conviction in the young man's words which impressed everyone, and eager questions poured in from all sides. Jack went on:

'Apply to Jeffries the test Hamlet applied to Claudius. He is nervous and superstitious, as we know, and if he were suddenly to be confronted with the ghost of his victim, in his terror he would surely let fall something which could be used against him.'

Lucy and Carrie exchanged troubled glances. They could form no idea of Scott's meaning. Ruggles looked puzzled. Only Mrs. Morley's quickened breathing showed that she thought there was something in the idea.

'Your plan is worthy of Jeffries himself,' remarked Ruggles, 'only, where do you intend to get your ghost?'

'I see what he means,' cried Kate; 'his plan is possible, quite possible. You know your resemblance to poor Richard. The main differ-

ence is in the way you wear your beard. Jeffries has no idea you are here, and it is years since he has seen you.'

'He has never seen me at all to my knowledge,' answered the journalist. 'I only saw him when he was on the lecture platform and I was in the audience. But am I to understand that you want me to sacrifice my beard and personate Cousin Dick's ghost?'

But, though Ruggles treated it thus lightly, the plan was seriously discussed. His resemblance in figure and feature to the dead man was undeniable—even Carrie, now that her attention was called to it, admitted that she was surprised that she had never noticed it before; but she had seen little of Dick Morley, and the beard altered the character of Ruggles' face. But Jimmy, while acknowledging the possibility of the trick, failed to see its utility.

'That I could frighten Jeffries or anybody else by personating my cousin,' he argued, 'I don't doubt. If you look for symptoms of fright you will find what you seek. But I do not see how you will be able to distinguish mere brutal terror from an awakened conscience.'

'We can only try,' urged Jack. 'In the

absence of any other plan it is worth a trial.'

'There is more than chance in the providential arrival of the one man who could successfully personate poor Richard,' remarked Kate, who had taken a favourable view of the idea from the first.

'Very well,' replied Ruggles. 'I am at your service; but to play the character I must have some hints as to costume and so forth.'

'Your present dress will do very well,' answered Kate; 'the general effect is all we need consider. Stoop your shoulders a little.'

'And the beard, of course, must come off,' added Carrie with a little nervous laugh.

'So be it,' cried Ruggles, assuming the tone of a martyr. 'By the way, where is the apparition to walk, and when?'

'As soon as possible,' answered Jack; 'it will be daylight presently, and to get the effect we want he must see you before the light gets too strong and before people are about. As for the place—nowhere better than outside this very door, the spot where the murder was committed.'

'But recollect,' objected Ruggles, 'I am an apparition with limitations. I can't appear to

anyone till he appears to me. Am I to hang around outside till Jeffries chances to pass?'

There was a dead silence. This obvious difficulty had occurred to no one. After a moment's painful hesitation and an evident struggle with herself, Kate spoke again.

'I can insure Mr. Jeffries coming here at once. That can be arranged. If you will step inside, Mr. Ruggles, and make your preparations, I can give you what you require.'

She opened the door leading into the other room, and the journalist rose. As he passed Jack he whispered significantly:

'I can guess the motive. I should not wonder if Jeffries were the man.' Then he added aloud, 'Thanks, cousin, I have a traveller's dressing-case in my pocket. That will furnish me with all that I shall need.'

He left the room, closing the door behind him. Kate seated herself at a little writing-table and dashed off a few rapid lines. She seemed anxious to act quickly so that she would have no time for thought, and she closed the letter without reading it over.

'Juan,' she said, 'you will take this to Mr. Jeffries, will you not?'

'Si, Señora,' replied the Mexican, advancing.

Jack noticed him for the first time, and shook hands with him, as the little ranchero, overflowing with sympathy and affection for the young man, placed himself, his life, and his future at the other's disposal. He would die for his friend, Señor Yascott, he said.

'You are not afraid of any trouble through going to the village?' asked Jack. 'They have warned you away, you know.'

Estudillo vowed that he feared nothing in the service of his friend.

'Well, you will give this note to Mr. Jeffries,' said Kate. 'Wake him up if he is asleep. Tell him it must be attended to immediately.'

'Si, Señora,' responded the Mexican.

They all stepped out on the verandah and watched him hasten across the Plateau. The eastern sky was beginning to pale with the first hint of approaching dawn.

Kate turned back to the house.

'Oh, what a contemptible part to play!' Jack heard her moan as she passed him. His heart smote him.

'It was painful for you to send that note. Why did you do it? We could have found

some other way. My troubles have made me selfish.'

'It is done, Mr. Scott, it is done,' she replied. 'Say no more about it.'

Lucy's spirits had risen as she saw that something was being attempted — however vague and intangible—to shift the burden of the accusation from the shoulders of the man she loved. She lingered a moment with Carrie on the verandah, and watched the dawn brightening.

'He might never have seen that sun rise again,' she murmured. 'I have much to be thankful for.'

Miss Van Zandt attempted to entertain her friend with the humours of her midnight wanderings with Mr. Ruggles.

'I declare, Carrie,' exclaimed Lucy, 'you have been up all night. And this is the day of the school picnic. You will not be fit to be seen.'

Carrie protested that she did not intend to go, but Lucy insisted.

'Of course you will go; why shouldn't you? You have promised to be there, you know. Besides, dear, I shall have to be with papa, and

some of us should be everywhere. Mr. Jeffries will be there, you know.'

'Very well,' assented Carrie; 'I'll go, if you want me to. Mr. Byrne offered to drive me over.'

'To drive you over where?' cried a voice behind them.

The girls turned, and Lucy with difficulty suppressed a scream. It seemed to her that Dick Morley stood once more in the door of his house. Mrs. Morley and Jack followed Ruggles out.

All complimented the journalist on his successful make-up; but Kate, who was nervous and unsettled, soon left the others and re-entered the house.

'Where is Mr. Byrne going to drive you?' persisted Ruggles, as soon as he was able to divert the conversation from his own appearance.

'To the school-children's picnic, if you must know,' answered Carrie.

'I adore picnics,' he remarked; 'if I were not a ghost and liable to scare the kids into seven kinds of fits I should like to go myself.'

Your ghostly *rôle* will be played out hours before it is time for the merry-making,' remarked Jack, with a desperate effort to speak lightly.

Lucy alone noticed his anxious troubled face, and slid her hand into his.

'Where is this picnic?' asked Ruggles.

'At Mr. Byrne's vineyard, I believe,' replied Carrie.

'That settles it; I must go,' cried Ruggles. 'Duty calls. I am here to write up Mr. Byrne's grapes.'

Jack could hardly restrain his impatience.

'I think, Jimmy, if you don't mind——' he began nervously.

'It's time to bait the trap, eh?' interrupted the journalist briskly. 'All right; I'm with you. I've got to climb up there, have I?' he added, looking up at the Table Rock. 'If poor Dick was such a hister as they say, I don't see how he kept himself steady for that climb every day. Here goes, then!'

He ascended the little path at the side, which was much easier than it seemed from below. Jack accompanied him, and the girls watched them from the verandah.

'Are such likenesses possible?' murmured Lucy, with a slight shiver.

'That's a question we'll leave for our psychological friend Jeffries to puzzle out at his leisure,' answered Carrie. 'Lucy, you look as white as a ghost yourself. Do come in and lie down.'

'One moment,' answered the girl, with her eyes still riveted to the figures on the rock. Scott had disposed Ruggles in Morley's accustomed attitude, and appeared to be giving him a few final instructions. The latter seemed in a bantering mood, and now and then his light laugh reached the girls where they stood.

At last Jack left him, and came lightly and rapidly down the rocky path.

'Come inside,' he said, as he gained the verandah. 'The house must be shut up and everything must seem as natural and quiet as possible when Jeffries comes on the ground.'

'But you're going to watch what he does, aren't you?' inquired Carrie.

'Oh, yes; I'm going to watch,' he answered. 'I have selected my look-out tower; but come in, come in.'

The door closed behind them, and Ruggles

stretched himself on the rock in such a position that he could command the chaparral path through which he expected Jeffries to appear. His face felt cold and unnatural, and he passed his hand over it, smiling when his touch encountered the moustache, which alone had been spared in imitation of Morley.

'The play's the thing,' he quoted with a silent laugh, 'but I hope I shan't have to do still life for any considerable time.'

And from behind the closed blinds of Morley's house four pairs of eyes were fixed on the Plateau.

CHAPTER XV

Before the final appeal which resulted in Scott's temporary liberation, Haman Jeffries had quietly left the crowd and taken the road to San Pablo. Whatever might be his reasons for desiring the young man's death, and they were evidently weighty, he recognised that events had passed beyond his control, and that further interference on his part would be alike unavailing and injudicious. He had been violently excited during the scenes at the church, and his mind was still too disturbed for connected thought.

He walked down the ravine, cutting viciously at the bushes with a light cane he carried, and starting nervously as the night breeze sighed through the trees, and their shadows wrought strange effects of motion on the patches of moonlight at his feet.

On reaching the Plaza he sought out a dark corner under the wall of the hotel, where he

watched and waited. He saw the men who had carried the Sheriff come out, and overheard enough of their conversation to learn that they were still in doubt as to the extent of Starkweather's injuries. Then they passed out of sight, and all was silent again.

Voices echoed from the ravine, and presently the whole body of the Vigilantes appeared—talking, arguing, occasionally swearing. They came on in detached groups, by twos and threes, and halted when they had gained the Plaza so as to give the stragglers time to come up. Masks were discarded, and the rough, hard-featured fellows looked grimly picturesque in the moonlight. The schoolmaster drew back further into the shadow, and shivered as from the effects of a physical chill.

'Sentimental fools!' he muttered.

Pat Byrne arrived among the last, and immediately suggested an adjournment to the Spread Eagle. He was evidently in high spirits, and he spoke with a hearty ring in his voice.

'Come over to the saloon, boys; this has been a quare sort of a night entirely, an' ye'll none o' ye be the worse for a nightcap before ye turn in. I'll open for ye; I've the key in me pocket.'

The suggestion met with general favour. Every-Day Pete, whose left hand was roughly bandaged in a blood-stained handkerchief, hailed the idea with enthusiasm.

'Bully for you, Pat; I need something to keep me from taking cold in my broken fingers.'

They all trooped over to the Spread Eagle, and presently vanished behind the swinging doors. The Plaza became once more silent and solitary. And still Jeffries watched and waited. For whom or for what? He did not himself know.

Another figure appeared from the ravine, and crossing the square with a brisk step entered the hotel, passing so close to Jeffries that the latter could have touched him by stretching out his hand. It was Jack Scott, come to inquire about the Sheriff. The schoolmaster drew himself together like a panther on the spring, and seemed about to fling himself on the advancing figure, while his hand sought his breast. But he suffered the young man to pass without making any demonstration, and stepped from the shadow with a bitter curse as the other vanished in the hotel entry.

'Where could I have lost that knife?' he

muttered. 'This is a pretty time for me to go unarmed.'

Then he reflected a moment. 'Ah, it is there,' he said. 'Of course it must be there! Why hadn't I thought of that before?'

He crossed the Plaza almost at a run, and descended one of the many narrow tracks that led down among the sand bluffs to the beach. The broad Pacific lay before him, smiling and dimpling under the moon, and calm as was its surface, the strand was laced with white from the ceaseless foaming and breaking of the languid ocean swell. The monotonous boom of the summer sea sounded weird and lonesome in the hush of the night.

Jeffries walked rapidly northward till he reached a spot where the ribs of an old boat, half buried in the sand, supplied him the landmark which he sought.

'It was somewhere hereabouts,' he muttered, and he commenced an earnest scrutiny of the strand, bending down to examine every inequality of the ground, and occasionally starting aside with an eager exclamation to pick up some stalk of seaweed, or stick of driftwood, which marred the level surface; only to let it fall again in

disappointment, and commence the search anew.

'It must be here,' he said aloud. 'I recollect now, how I let it fall, and—yes—this is the very spot! Not ten yards from the old boat-frame.'

Taking this stranded waif as a centre, he ranged all round it, going in a circle of some thirty or forty yards in diameter, and marking off the ground with his cane so that no part should escape scrutiny. Evidently he attached great importance to the quest.

'If any one should pick it up,' he mused with a shudder. 'Well, what if they did?' he went on defiantly, as if arguing some disputed question with a visible adversary. 'What if they did? It proves nothing—but I wish I could find it.'

And then, for the third or fourth time, he began to travel round his circle with the patient attention of a hound on the trail.

'I should have come sooner,' he muttered; 'but I had no chance; I didn't think of it till I saw that fellow; besides, in any case I would have been obliged to wait for night.'

And so the search went on till the light of the westering moon was withdrawn, and a filmy

grey mist blurred the outlines of sea and shore.

An added touch of rawness in the air, and a fresher edge to the breeze, showed that the dawn was not far off.

Then Jeffries relinquished his purpose, and turned back toward San Pablo by the way he had come.

The square was still deserted, and looked gloomier than ever since the moon had set; but from the Spread Eagle a hum of voices and a clink of glasses showed that the Vigilantes were still astir, and had probably determined to see the night through.

The schoolmaster approached the saloon and peeped in through the doors. There had been no secession from the ranks which Byrne had led in some hours before. The whole band that had been present at the attack on the church at midnight was still awake and animated at four o'clock in the morning. Jeffries would have liked to enter and join the party. He was a man who never drank; he was as fanatical in his abstinence as in all his other beliefs and theories; but at this moment he was chilled and dispirited; he seemed to feel the want of

human companionship, and the interior of the saloon looked bright and inviting in contrast to the damp mist that was creeping up from the beach. He pushed the door partly open and stepped inside. No one noticed him. Mr. Byrne stood near the end of the bar, and was speaking as the schoolmaster entered.

'It may be as ye say, Mr. Smith. You call Haman Jeffries a crank, an' sorry I'd be to dispute your word; but I'd be loath to state that as me own opinion without qualification. He's a highly intelligent man, divil a doubt of that; an' the childher all take to him, an' that's no bad sign. There's my boy, Pat, swears by him. But—an' ye'll folly me in this, gintlemen—wan man doesn't make a dead set at another without raison; an' if ye'll tell me the raison why a harmless gintleman like the schoolmaster was so almighty anxious to put a rope round the neck of another harmless gintleman like my bookkeeper, ye'll greatly obleege me, an' ye'll let the first glimpse o' daylight into the mystery o' Drunken Dick's murder. Fill 'em up again, Charley.'

Jeffries slipped out into the night and paced to and fro in the Plaza with rapid steps. No

one had seen him. He had looked into the saloon to find himself an object of speculation and discussion in his absence, and, like most listeners, what he heard did not please him. More and more strongly he felt that there was a duel to the death between himself and Jack Scott. The schoolmaster realised that he had a powerful ally in time. If he could postpone the combat he would win without a struggle. If the game could be deferred, the stakes would be adjudged without effort. He glanced at his watch. Almost four o'clock. His ally had been working for him silently and steadily, while he had been distressing himself at his own forced inaction. Jack Scott had less than twenty hours left.

A voice accosting him from the darkness startled Jeffries violently. He swerved aside like a frightened horse, and for a moment could not command his voice to reply, though he speedly recognised that the man who had addressed him was only Corvey, the despised and degraded village loafer.

'It's a fine night, Mr. Jeffries,' said Corvey. 'Say, you haven't got two bits in your clothes you could lend a fellow till pay-day, have you?'

This was one of Corvey's favourite fictions. He always assumed that a pay-day dawned for him in each week, though, as he never was known to work, it naturally followed that he never had any pay to receive. How the man lived no one could have told, himself least of all. It was one of the standing marvels of San Pablo. Perhaps Pat Byrne could have hazarded a guess.

Jeffries, recovering his voice with an effort, gave a reply to which Corvey was well accustomed, though he had never known the schoolmaster so 'out of sorts' as he seemed this night. But Corvey was not to be disposed of so easily. He had drunk full and deep earlier in the evening, and had slept off part of his liquor under the lee of a soft sand-wreath on the beach, and he was tormented with an inward sinking which told him that it was time to 'freshen the nip;' so he returned to the charge.

'Ye needn't be so hard on a poor fellow, schoolmaster,' he whined. 'Because you never drink yourself, that's no sign that you knows what other people's constitootions requires. I tell you if I don't have a drain soon I'll have the horrors before morning.'

'Will you go away and not bother me?' cried Jeffries with nervous petulance. 'I tell you I've nothing for you.'

'Only two bits, Guv'nor. You'll not feel that. And I'll pay you Saturday—wish I may die if I don't. I've been doing some chores for Pat Byrne, and I've money coming to me. Roast me alive if I ain't. Say, I'll tell you what I'll do,' he added, struck by a sudden inspiration as the schoolmaster turned away. 'Here's a knife, a bully clasp knife. You can keep that till I pay you. That's collat, that is.'

He thrust the long buckhorn-handled knife into Jeffries' hand before the other could refuse it. The schoolmaster was on the point of throwing it down, but something about it suddenly caught his eye and seemed to attract him. He looked at it narrowly, turning it over and over. It was an expensive, well-finished weapon, and, with the exception of a little rust where the blade joined the haft, was as good as new.

'Where did you get this knife?' asked Jeffries, examining it closely.

'I came by it honestly, that's all you need care about it,' answered Corvey. 'It's good value for a quarter, ain't it?'

'I'm not a pawnbroker,' said the schoolmaster slowly. 'I can't lend money on things. Tell me where you got this—the truth, mind—and I'll see what I can do.'

'Well, I found it down to the shore, 'bout ten or eleven o'clock,' answered Corvey reluctantly; 'but that ain't got nothing to do with it. Findins keepins, you know. Are you going to let me have that two bits?'

'I'll not lend you money on it, but I'll buy it if you wish,' replied Jeffries. 'I'll give you four bits for it.'

'Make it a dollar, boss,' cried Corvey enthusiastically, 'and it's a trade.'

Though there could be no doubt that Corvey would be glad to sell his find for anything he could get, Jeffries handed him a dollar without a word, and the drunkard made straight for the Spread Eagle with the price of an hour's bestial happiness in his pocket.

'That was why I could not find it,' muttered Jeffries. 'If I had had it when Scott passed awhile ago—who knows? Perhaps it is best as it is.'

And he put the knife in his pocket.

CHAPTER XVI

THE schoolmaster turned into a little street that led out of the Plaza toward the south, and passing one or two detached frame houses, reached his own, which stood facing the ocean a little back from the road. It was a neat cottage, consisting of four rooms and a tiny hall, all on one floor, and it was far snugger and more homelike than the majority of such dwellings at San Pablo. Jeffries, who was a bachelor, lived there alone, a Chinaman coming in by the day to do the work and cook the meals.

The schoolmaster let himself in with a key, and lighted a candle which stood ready to his hand in the little hall. Then he entered the room to his right—not his bedroom—and setting the candle on the table took from a shelf a large meerschaum pipe and a canister of tobacco. He smoked with long rapid inspirations, like one who sought the sedative influence of the plant

without caring for its fragrance. And as he smoked he reflected.

Haman Jeffries never entered this house without thinking of Kate Morley. His love for her, half sensual, half mystical, was the strongest passion in his strange, distorted nature, a nature compact of strength, powerful in its delusions, in its fantasies and in its purposes. He had known and loved her for nearly three years, and his feeling for Kate Morley was the same as it had been at any time since the day he first met her. His love—if such a strange, tormented fancy is worthy to be described by that word—had leaped into life at sight of her. It had burned with a changeless flame ever since. From the first he had determined to win Kate Morley for his own.

That he had found her married made no difference to Jeffries. He had seen at a glance that Kate's womanly nature had nothing in common with the drunken sot whose name she bore, and he did not make sufficient allowance for Mrs. Morley's religious and conscientious character. He believed that Drunken Dick could not live long—what he strongly desired usually ended by becoming an article of faith

with Haman Jeffries—and he regarded Dick as the sole obstacle to his union with Kate. But when three years passed, and the drunken husband lived on, the schoolmaster, with all his faith in an ordered future, grew wofully impatient. At last the obstacle was removed—removed with appalling suddenness and by means on which no man could have calculated; and still the prize for which Haman had striven and waited seemed beyond his reach.

He looked round the room with an impatient sigh. He had furnished and adorned it solely with a view to Kate's comfort and taste, yet she had never seen it. But so strong was the man's desire for the woman whom, in the strange jargon of his creed, he thought of as his soul's affinity, and so entirely did his theory of predestination square itself with his hopes, that he never doubted but he would ultimately bring Kate Morley to the home he had prepared for her.

He reviewed the position and weighed chances with a calculation which showed that he looked on Fate as marching to its accomplishment through human accidents. Mrs. Morley was alone in the world, so he reasoned; she was

poor, and the conditions of her life with Drunken Jack had not been such as to admit of her forming any close friendships. She would find herself alone in the world, and beset by many anxieties and troubles. He had placed himself at her service: to him she would naturally turn when the difficulties of her isolated situation became too many for her. He was content to wait. Every hour was bringing him closer to the realisation of his dream.

And so he was found by Juan Estudillo when the Mexican knocked at the door with Kate Morley's letter in his hand.

It was the summons that Jeffries had been expecting. It had come sooner than he had looked for it, but that was a matter for congratulation rather than for misgiving. The note was very brief. It merely asked him to come to the Plateau at once, and was signed 'Kate Morley.' But he asked no more. The appeal had been made. Fate, with irresistible force, had swept the woman he desired to his arms. The rest was in his own hands.

He was strangely cool and collected. All the nervousness that had tormented him during the earlier hours of the night had passed away, and

he was conscious of neither doubt nor fear, only a diffused glow of triumph which touched his pale cheeks with hectic colour, and gave his black eyes an unwonted brilliancy, that made them shine and flash from under the heavy dark brows. Juan was no close observer, and saw nothing unusual in the schoolmaster's manner and appearance as he read the brief letter at a glance, and crushed it together in his hand with a curt, 'All right. I will go.'

But he did not start immediately. He offered Estudillo refreshments which the latter declined, and he expressed his surprise that the Mexican should have ventured down to the village after the rough treatment he had experienced and in view of the stern warning he had received from the Vigilantes.

Juan was non-committal in his reply.

'Ah, Señor, a man must visit the pueblo at times. Besides, one is a neighbour, and a neighbour has duties.'

This reference to Kate's unprotected position touched Jeffries.

'You are a good fellow, Juan,' he said, offering his hand; 'and, after all, it is unreasonable to expect you to keep out of town for six

months. I do not think you incur much risk in coming. This much more serious business of Mr. Scott will occupy all the Committee's attention.'

Juan's only reply was to shrug his shoulders and spread out the palms of his hands, a gesture common enough among Mexicans, and which may mean anything or nothing.

'Where is Carmelita?' inquired the schoolmaster; 'I have not seen her for nearly a week. She is not ill, I hope?'

Carmelita was Estudillo's little daughter, and had been a regular attendant at Jeffries' school up till a few days before.

Juan explained that he had not liked to send her while he himself was in such bad odour at San Pablo.

'Pooh, pooh!' answered Jeffries. 'You mustn't keep the child back for any such fancy as that. Let her come down to the picnic at Mr. Byrne's vineyard to-day. It will be a good beginning for her, for she can join the other children at play, and need not pass through the village at all.'

Juan promised that he would do so, and then, excusing himself, hurried away. As nearly

as he could understand from the conversation he had heard at Morley's, the schoolmaster was to be made the victim of some witch spell or sorcery, and the Mexican had no desire to be mixed up in any such uncanny experiments. So he went straight home.

Jeffries took his hat and coat from the nail on which he had hung them on entering. He put them on, and then hesitated a moment, looking round the room to make sure he had forgotten nothing. He had been up all night and had walked a considerable distance, besides undergoing an unusual degree of excitement and emotion; yet he was conscious of neither fatigue nor drowsiness. Still, as a sacrifice to prudence, he delayed yet a moment while he searched a cupboard for something to eat. He found some bread, and breaking off a piece, ate it standing at the table. A glass of water finished his frugal meal, and then he extinguished the candle, wrapped his cloak closely round him, and went out into the shimmering uncertain light of the early dawn.

Voices and laughter reached him as he crossed the Plaza. The Spread Eagle was still open and he peeped in as he passed. Byrne was

no longer there, and Boone and most of the Vigilantes had disappeared. Field, however, his terrier face ablaze with excitement, was still holding forth, with immoderate gesticulation, to a group of half a dozen men. Charley Whitehead yawned behind the bar, and Corvey lay stretched in a drunken slumber under the billiard-table, where some one had charitably rolled him, out of the way of trampling feet.

Jeffries turned from the saloon and glanced up at the hotel. There was no light in any of the windows, and he vaguely wondered which was Jack Scott's room. He had seen the young man go in, and concluded that he was there still. After such a night a man would need rest. Jeffries smiled grimly and passed on.

Once more he struck into the sandy road whose surface had been spurned by so many hurrying feet during the last twelve hours. The dawn was well advanced now, and the landscape looked ghostly and deserted in the pale morning light.

Where the chaparral narrowed in close to the path it was still very dark, but in the clearing round the church everything was plainly visible. The door stood wide open as the Sheriff had

flung it when he had come out to confront the mob. Jeffries stepped aside through the gate in the picket fence and went up to the porch. His nerves were playing him no tricks, and he gloried in their unwonted strength. There were a few drops of blood on the steps. They might have come from the Sheriff or from Every-Day Pete—theirs were the only two casualties of the night assault.

Jeffries had a constitutional antipathy to the sight of blood. He scraped up a few handfuls of sand and scattered it over the dark stains, pressing it down with his feet. Then he glanced at his watch. Five o'clock. Surely he need delay no longer. He could go to Mrs. Morley now, especially as she had urged him to come at once.

He started across the clearing at a quicker pace.

Something became entangled round his legs, nearly throwing him down. With a muttered exclamation he recovered himself, and stooped to examine the obstruction. It was a riato—a long rope—and it lay there just as Jack had flung it from his neck when the Committee had decided to reprieve him. The noose was widely

stretched, and gaped on the ground as if waiting for its prey. The sight seemed to discompose Jeffries, for he turned away with a shudder, and plunging once more into the chaparral followed the steep road as it wound up to Morley's Plateau.

As he drew near to the house that held the woman for whom he had waited so long, Jeffries' spirits rose. The end was at hand, and it was not for him to scrutinise the means by which Fate had accomplished its purpose. Kate's summons could have but one meaning. Her stubborn pride was broken down at last; she had appealed to him, and that appeal could mean nothing but a cry of capitulation.

'So they rise who are not afraid to climb,' he muttered, vigorously breasting the steep incline. 'My dream will come true at last. Poor weak woman! Could she hope to resist her destiny?'

A turn in the path brought him in view of the house. There it stood, on the further edge of the clearing, distinctly outlined in the faint morning light. Jeffries stopped and scanned it anxiously. Door and windows were alike blank and shut. There was no sign of life about the

place. Could it be all a deception, a trick? No; her letter was in his pocket; he had recognised the handwriting. Behind one of those darkened windows, expressionless as closed eyelids, Kate Morley was awaiting him. He emerged from the trees and stepped briskly across the Plateau.

The road ran perilously close to the gully, and Haman could not avert his eyes from its depths. It exercised a morbid fascination upon him, and drew his gaze downward. The rocky sides were clothed with scrub and cactus, and the shadows of night still lay thickly in the abyss. Jeffries shivered as he looked. What a plunge for a man to take! Was Dick Morley dead when he pitched headlong off that rock, or did death come to him among the cruel stones of that dim gulf? It was a frightful fall! Certainly not less than a hundred feet from the summit of Table Rock.

Jeffries had advanced within a few paces of the house before he looked up to verify anew his estimate of the depth, and as he raised his eyes his heart stood still, and a weight like lead chained his limbs motionless. All the blood in his body seemed to stagnate and curdle in his

veins, and his knees trembled and shook beneath him.

There, within a few yards of him, on the very edge of Table Rock, stood Richard Morley.

There was no illusion or deception possible. The light was abundant, and the features, the figure, the attitude of the dead man were unmistakeable.

'Does the grave give up its dead?' gasped the schoolmaster.

The apparition slowly raised its right hand and pointed with accusing finger at Jeffries.

'Murderer!'

The hollow sepulchral voice gave added gravity to the formidable denunciation which seemed to thunder in Jeffries' ears with an appalling volume of sound. He strove to articulate, he tried to raise his arm in deprecatory gesture, but the muscles refused to obey his will, and the tongue rattled dryly in his mouth.

With a faint moan the wretched man fell forward on his face and lay senseless.

At the same instant the door of Morley's house opened and Jack sprang down the steps.

Jimmy Ruggles joined him beside the prostrate body.

'We've killed him, I'm afraid,' cried the journalist, terrified at the result of the experiment.

'No, no, he's only fainted,' said Jack after a hurried examination. 'Now what do you think?'

'I think that we are just where we were before,' answered Ruggles.

'Then you do not see the effects of conscience in this signal overthrow?' asked Scott, pointing to the prostrate figure.

'It may be conscience; it may be only cowardice or weak nerves.'

'I don't agree with you,' replied Jack. 'But the experiment isn't over yet. The first thing is to bring this man to his senses again.'

At that moment voices reached the two friends from the chaparral path.

'Here come some people,' said Jack quickly. 'They mustn't see me at this, and they'd better not see you at all just at present. Get into the house.'

'But we can't leave this poor fellow like that,' objected Ruggles.

'They'll look after him. It's Smith; I know his voice. Come,' and Jack dragged the journalist back to the steps.

Before the new comers came out on the clearing the door was closed, and the first rays of the newly risen sun, slanting through the trees, shone only on the red sand of the Plateau and the dusty green of the stunted shrubs.

Smith and Hank Dollett, who had agreed to clear away the cobwebs of the night by an early stroll, came along the path and almost stepped on Jeffries before they saw him.

'It's the schoolmaster!' cried the startled man, springing back a pace. 'Now what in thunder——?'

'He isn't drunk, anyhow,' remarked Dollett, 'as I'd say if it was 'most anyone else, and he isn't dead. Come, schoolmaster, brace up; give an account of yourself.'

Jeffries, raised to his feet between the two men, slowly opened his eyes. He kept his face turned from Table Rock, and looked from one to the other in a bewildered way.

'What's the matter, Jeffries? What's happened you?' asked Smith.

The schoolmaster caught his breath with an effort, and answered faintly with a weak, shuddering sigh :

'Take me home, please. Take me home. I've seen a shocking sight to-day.'

CHAPTER XVII

LITTLE business was done on the day following Dick Morley's murder. San Pablo was suffering from reaction, and her citizens, a large number of whom had been up all night, lounged vacantly about the Plaza, or occupied chairs on the hotel verandah, where they smoked or chewed as taste impelled them, and discussed the events of the past twenty-four hours.

It was the day of the school picnic, too; always a festival of importance in the village, and it was something to see the merry groups of children collecting in the square and starting for the vineyard in charge of Mr. Jeffries—a merry, light-hearted band to which the recent tragedy afforded subject for conversation, without in the least affecting its prevailing high spirits.

'The schoolmaster seems to have got over his fit bravely,' remarked Dollett to Smith as the

two men watched the procession forming in the Plaza.

'Jeffries is a queer snoozer,' returned the storekeeper, removing the cigar from his lips to see if it burned true. 'He's always having visions and he gets over them again. Not but what I'll confess that that special correspondent from 'Frisco looks enough like Drunken Dick to give any man a turn if he came across him unexpectedly.'

'It is queer how much one man may look like another,' replied Dollett. 'Do you reckon the schoolmaster saw him?'

'It seems like it,' answered Smith. 'He swore he had seen Morley, but of course all that business about his being on the rock was nothing but spiritualist trimmings. What would Mr. Ruggles be doing stuck up there, even if he was anywhere around that hour of the morning, which I doubt?'

Haman Jeffries certainly showed no signs of the shock he had experienced a few hours before, and he shepherded his little flock out of San Pablo as composedly as though there was nothing on his mind but the prospect of a day of pleasure.

Punctually at twelve o'clock, Mr. Byrne drew up his handsome pair of bay horses at the hotel entrance. The Hon. Pat was clean and spry and freshly shaven. There were no traces of a sleepless night about him. His black frock coat, a garment which no stress of southern sun could ever persuade him to lay aside, was thoroughly orthodox. His tall hat was neatly brushed, and his whole appearance showed that he had made a toilet for the occasion. He even wore a flower in his button-hole, and the anxious way in which he occasionally adjusted it proved that the ornament was an unwonted care. Mr. Byrne had called by appointment to drive Miss Carrie Van Zandt over to the vineyard.

That young lady presently appeared, looking cool and pretty in a fresh muslin dress, and wearing a broad shade hat adorned with blue ribbons, tilted forward over her face till the brim almost rested on the tip of her aspiring little nose. Carrie could not boast much regularity of feature, but youth, health, and unfailing spirits united with a delicate complexion and a frank, joyous expression to make her a very attractive girl.

Lucy came to the door to see her friend start, and, in reply to Mr. Byrne's inquiry, told him that her father was quite comfortable, and that Dr. Meares had promised that he should be allowed to get up later in the day. This was good news to the worthy Irishman, and his spirits rose accordingly.

'An' that's a good hearin',' he said heartily. 'I tell ye last night was a howly terror, but sure look at it now—it's all gone.'

If he meant the night, he was assuredly within the truth, for the full glare of the noonday sun lay upon everything, and it was impossible not to feel that the dangers of the darkness must have vanished with its shadows.

'Good-bye, dear!' called Lucy, as Mr. Byrne helped Carrie into the waggon, and carefully disposed laprobe and duster so as to guard the freshness of her toilet from the effects of a three-mile drive over the powdery roads. 'Good-bye, dear, and I hope you'll have a good time.'

'If you'd only think betther of it, and come yourself, Miss Lucy, there's lashins and lavins of room for ye, an' it's mesilf 'ud only be too proud and happy to have two such young ladies wan

on each side of me, and be here like a rose betune two thorns.'

Both the girls laughed heartily at the Hon. Pat's inverted compliment, and he drove off covered with confusion, and profoundly conscious that he had not said exactly what he had intended.

Carrie soon rallied him out of his temporary embarrassment. She was anxious to know if he thought that Jack Scott was still in any danger, and, if so, what steps could be taken for the young man's protection.

On this point Mr. Byrne speedily reassured her. In his opinion the fiercer passions of the mob had cooled down since the night before, and though he admitted that it would be well if Jack could run down the murderer, he did not think that his life would be sacrificed to his failure.

'It's all this way, me dear young lady,' he said. 'If so be as the boys are left alone, an' not stirred up more betune this an' to-night, they'll meet him at the Knob, and chin a bit, an' end by handin' him over to the Sheriff.'

'But if they are stirred up?' persisted Carrie.

'In that case, no one can tell what'll happen.

It'll be last night over again, an' maybe mightn't chance to have as lucky an indin'. But sure, who's to stir thim up?' he added cheerfully. 'Not me nor you, I'm sure, nor anywan else I can think of.'

'Mr. Field seemed very bitter about it,' said the girl meditatively.

'Mr. Field, me dear young lady, is a gintleman and a scholar,' answered Byrne; 'not but what I can't deny he's been doin' more incinerary writin' since this Vigilance Committee started nor I altogether approve of.'

'I wonder you let him continue to edit your paper, then,' remarked Carrie.

Mr. Byrne closed his right eye, and his face assumed an expression of deep astuteness.

'The "Indipindint" must come out, an' there's only two men in the town capable o' bringin' it out. Wan is Chamberlain Field, and wan is Jack Scott. Now av I were to sack Field to-day and they was to hang Scott to-night—which God forbid, but I say av they were to—where'd I be? I'd be lift, that's where I'd be. But wait till this throuble is over an I can git a new iditor down from the Bay, an' I'll sack Foxy so quick it'll mek his head swim.'

'I see,' she replied, scarcely able to repress a smile at her companion's suddenly assumed air of wisdom.

'Av coorse ye do, me dear young lady,' he replied. 'I must be on the safe side, but I don't think they'll hang Jack this time.'

'If there is any danger,' said Carrie meditatively, 'I should think the best thing he could do would be to escape.'

'The divil a worse—I ax yer pardon, me dear young lady, it's the very worst thing he cud do. If they found it out they'd shoot him on sight, and if they thought he'd desaved them in what he said last night—it isn't this side o' the boorder o' San Antonio county they'd stop huntin' him. But Jack's a lad of his word an' a brave lad into the bargain. He'll thry no such a foolish thrick as that.'

On the whole, Carrie found Mr. Byrne's opinion decidedly consolatory, and embraced it for the same reason, if not with the same degree of faith, that many people embrace religion—because it was comforting.

As they passed the church, Mr. Byrne reined in for a moment, and remarked:

'There's the idifice that was the centre of all the thrubble last night.'

'The edifice!' repeated Carrie with great contempt. 'No one but you Californians would ever dream of calling such a thing an edifice. Isn't it built of wood?'

'Well,' replied Byrne, 'I'm not o' their way o' thinkin' mesilf, but there's a many respectable men do all the prayin' they find time for inside them four walls.'

'Yes,' said Carrie, 'they pray in it by day, and batter it down at night; now they wouldn't do that to a stone church. There's more sanctity about it.'

'Yes, there's a heap more sanctity in stone nor in wood when ye come at it wid a battering ram,' assented Byrne.

'That isn't what I mean,' objected Carrie. 'Who could ever feel religious in a frame church! And just think how wooden the organ must sound!'

'Maybe it would, but there's no organ,' remarked Byrne.

'No organ!' cried she. 'That's just like you Californians. How do you ever expect to get to heaven without an organ?'

'Ye must ax me somethin' aisier, me dear young lady,' replied Byrne, and giving the bays the rein the church was soon left behind.

'You are going to show Mr. Ruggles over your vineyard to-day, are you not?' inquired Carrie after a short silence.

'I'm afeard I won't be able to wait very long; I have to go on to San Antonio this afternoon,' answered the Irishman. 'But I didn't know as ye knew anything about Mr. Ruggles.'

'Why, certainly I do,' answered Carrie. 'I knew him in 'Frisco, and I met him afterwards on the stage and rode with him the whole way from Orvietas to San Miguel.'

'Did ye now, me dear young lady,' returned the Hon. Pat. 'I'm sure ye med the journey mighty pleasant for him.'

'Really, Mr. Byrnes——' began Carrie.

'Byrne, me dear lady, Byrne,' he interrupted 'There's only wan of me.'

'Mr. Byrne, then. I never feel quite sure whether you are laughing at me or not.'

'Laugh,' protested Pat; 'why should I laugh? I smile wid pleasure at havin' the likes of ye to talk to, maybe.'

'There you are again,' rejoined she. 'You Californians are so absurdly complimentary.'

'Sure soft speeches must be the breath of our nostrils,' returned Pat gallantly, 'when we see a star from the East come to visit us.'

'Now, now, Mr. Byrne, this will never do,' was Carrie's laughing remonstrance. 'As a married man——'

'And how d' ye know I'm a married man?' he interrupted.

'Do you think I could have been twenty-four hours in San Pablo without making the acquaintance of your charming little boy?' asked she.

'The young vilyan,' exclaimed Byrne, with an attempt at mock indignation to hide his intense pride. 'Is it come to this that me own boy is beginnin' to cut his ould father out already? But this time there's no harm done. I'm a widower.'

'So is Sheriff Starkweather,' remarked Carrie. 'Upon my word I must take care not to lose my heart to any of you Californians. You seem to get rid of your wives too promptly.'

Pat laughed and changed the subject. He had wheeled his horses into a narrow track

bordering the foothills to the left, and began to explain the situation of the vineyard. Carrie, who recognised the place as that at which she had made a wrong turning the night before, was quietly amused. Her companion soon noticed this.

'Now it's you's laughin' at me, an' sarve me right,' he said.

'No, I assure you,' the girl hastened to explain. 'I was laughing at my own thoughts. But I am paying attention, really. Tell me what is that odd looking hill, taller than the others?'

'That's Lone Pine Knob,' he answered, and the reply immediately brought Miss Van Zandt's vagrant fancies home.

If Byrne were wrong; if the mob still nursed its vengeance; if some one were found to inflame the passions of the Vigilantes and work upon their feelings, how tragically might end this fair summer day! Carrie thought of Haman Jeffries and shuddered.

They had reached the entrance to the vineyard, and there Mr. Byrne left the carriage in charge of a Mexican helper, and proceeded to escort Miss Van Zandt up the hill.

The vines, trained on their poles, and sometimes on convenient trees or shrubs, grew rank and luxuriant, often so tall as to form regular fences over which Miss Van Zandt could not look. The vineyard was much neglected, as Mr. Byrne owned with a sigh, but to the girl it was the more picturesque on that account, and the rich red and purple clusters, nestling among the green leaves, afforded the eye a feast of colour which Carrie was artist enough to appreciate. To the Hon. Pat all this lush vegetation was merely good property running to waste, and he groaned in spirit and cursed the strikers under his breath.

Voices and laughter, echoing through the leafy screens, showed that they had reached the head-quarters of the picnic. Miss Van Zandt put her finger on her lips to impress caution on her companion, and peeping through a mass of vines was rewarded with a pretty sight.

There was an open space of perhaps half an acre in extent, the centre of which was occupied by a kind of sunken cellar, the bricked face of which, with its massive grating of iron bars, was directly opposite to her. This gate stood open now, showing the excavation, which was

quite extensive and was lined throughout with brick. The interior looked dim and cool, in pleasant contrast to the garish sunshine on the hillside. Mr. Byrne had caused this cellar to be dug in his vineyard, and used it sometimes as a wine vault and sometimes for other purposes, but it was empty now.

There were about forty children on the ground, some picking grapes, though no doubt this amusement had already palled to a great extent, for the majority was gathered round a boy, whom the Hon. Pat recognised as his son and heir, who was haranguing the group with much earnestness and extravagant gesticulation.

'D'ye mind that now?' chuckled the father with keen appreciation, and forgetting himself so far as to emphasise his remark by a dig of the elbow in his companion's ribs. 'He's a nateral born boss. Blessed if he ain't.' Carrie withdrew a little from Mr. Byrne's perilous neighbourhood and looked round for Jeffries. There he was, seated on the shady side of a large pile of vine-poles, not reading apparently, though he had a book on his knee, but with his eyes fixed on the ground, either sleeping or buried in his own thoughts.

'Mr. Jeffries does not seem very lively,' remarked Carrie, calling Mr. Byrne's attention to the attitude of the schoolmaster.

'Ah, he's quare,' responded the Hon. Pat. 'He does be dramin' more nor half his time, an' whin he isn't dramin' he's consoortin' wid spirits. He's not quite right.'

'I suppose we may as well go on and join them,' said Carrie after she had watched the group for a moment longer.

'Just as ye plaze, me dear young lady,' replied Byrne; 'but I think I'll lave ye for awhile. Mr. Ruggles is somewhere about the place, an' I've got to see that he's all right. I'll look in on ye agen before I start for San Antonio.' He raised his hat with the exaggerated air of politeness which was habitual with him, and disappeared among the vines. The girl turned again, as soon as he was out of sight, to look at the children. Under the leadership of young Pat they had drawn closer to the leafy screen behind which Miss Van Zandt was standing. Jeffries still sat wrapt and motionless.

'Now, kids,' cried young Byrne's shrill voice, 'I'll show you a bully game. You hear me?'

'What is it?' asked a small, tow-headed youngster, whose widely opened eyes seemed always on the look-out for something new.

'Murder and lynching,' was Pat's startling reply. 'Now, Johnny, here's your pistol and you hold it so.'

He put a stick into the boy's hand, who grasped it with that readiness of make-believe which for childhood transforms everything into reality. Young Pat proceeded to organise his game.

'You're to be the murdered man,' he went on, selecting a boy to fill the *rôle* of victim, 'and when he shoots, you have to tumble over and squirm, so.'

Carrie glanced at Jeffries. He was not asleep, for his eyes were open, but at the distance at which she stood his words, if he uttered any, were inaudible. But he took no notice of the children.

The game was in full progress. The assassin was posted under the shelter of a neighbouring vine; the victim was seated at a few paces' distance, smoking an imaginary pipe. An unforeseen difficulty occurred to a little dark-eyed maiden.

'How will he know when he's shot?' she asked.

Pat junior was equal to the emergency.

'Johnny must make a click with his tongue, same as if he was driving a horse,' replied the inventor of the game. 'I know. I'd do the shooting myself only I'd have to be lynched, and then I wouldn't be able to show you how to do it properly.'

Carrie did not altogether approve of this sport, and felt as if she ought to interfere, but she did not move. She was conscious of a thrill of the nerves—an excited desire to see what would come next, and she laughed and called herself as very a child as any there, but she held her breath and waited for young Pat's next order.

'Shoot!' cried the boy.

A click came from the ambush, a wild, confused tumble was executed by the victim, and a general rush forward by the children. Evidently the game was popular.

The murderer was seized and dragged from his lair amid wild cries of 'Lynch, lynch him,' and young Pat slipped round Johnny's neck a tendril of vine which he had noosed in imitation of a rope.

The sudden movement and the shouts had aroused the schoolmaster. He came forward quickly as he discovered the import of the game.

'For shame, for shame, children,' he cried. 'Drop that, Byrne, drop that this instant. How dare you make a burlesque of that horrible scene?'

'We're only playing,' expostulated Pat, not relishing this interruption of his sport.

'Playing!' echoed Jeffries passionately. 'What a world is this, where the very children play at tragedy! If you must imitate your elders, find some game which reflects the brighter side of our natures—not the blackest.'

'I'm on my pa's land,' grumbled young Byrne, evidently disposed to mutiny; but the schoolmaster was reinforced by the appearance of Carrie.

'Mr. Jeffries is right, children,' she said as she came forward. 'That isn't a pretty game at all.'

The schoolmaster took her interference strangely. He turned away without a word and resumed the place he had left in the shade of the vinepoles.

Miss Van Zandt drew back a little with an

offended movement. 'But of course you are in Mr. Jeffries' charge, not in mine,' she continued.

Haman heard the remark and hastened to apologise.

'I beg your pardon, Miss Van Zandt,' he said; 'I intended no disrespect. If you would be kind enough to take the children off my hands for half an hour it would be a real charity. I have a bad headache, and really should not be held accountable for what I say or do to-day.'

This explanation was ample to the kind-hearted girl.

'I am very sorry your head aches, Mr. Jeffries,' she said. 'I will gladly play with the little ones for half an hour or so. I came here expecting it. Come along,' she continued, as the schoolmaster remained silent. 'Let us play a pretty game that the little girls can join in. Why not hide and seek?'

This suggestion was hailed with enthusiasm, and Carrie went on: 'One of the girls shall hide and the boy that finds her shall kiss her.'

'All right!' cried Pat Byrne. 'You hide, Carmelita.'

'Some one's sure to find me,' objected the dark-eyed little maiden.

'That's all right,' rejoined young Pat. 'I'll find you, and you like kissing me; you know you do.'

'Now she must have a fair start and time enough to hide herself,' urged Carrie, as the Mexican child vanished down one of the vine-bordered alleys.

In a few minutes Miss Van Zandt led the laughing troop in pursuit, and the open space around the vault was deserted save for the dark figure of Jeffries, recumbent in the shadow.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE schoolmaster lay silent and motionless, with his face turned away from the glare of the sun. He did not move even when Juan Estudillo appeared among the vines and passed within a few yards. Juan had been at the vineyard all the morning, but had kept himself in the background with a modesty not unnatural in a man who had been so unceremoniously ejected from the town within a week. But he had been anxious to assure himself that the sins of the father had not been visited on the child in the person of his little Carmelita, and he had noticed with pleasure that the girl had been received by her schoolfellows on a footing of perfect equality.

Satisfied as to Carmelita, Juan proceeded to consult his own comfort in his own way. He selected a shady nook, where he reclined at his ease, and smoked husk cigarettes with that

appreciation of utter laziness which is characteristic of his race. Presently the cigarette dropped from his fingers; his eyes closed, his head nodded, and Juan Estudillo was soon deep in the siesta to which every true-born Mexican loves to treat himself at midday.

Meanwhile Jeffries lay motionless, and the laughter of the children, faintly heard in the distance, seemed only to make this part of the vineyard appear more lonesome.

Voices were heard along one of the terraces, and Mr. Byrne appeared, talking in an animated manner with Jimmy Ruggles.

'Av ye had seen him, Mr. Ruggles,' the worthy Irishman was saying; 'av ye had seen him ye wouldn't wonder. Ye're as like Dick Morley as two—as two——' Mr. Byrne looked round for a simile—'as two grapes, an' liker.'

'So every one that meets me tells me,' answered Jimmy. 'He was my cousin, you know.'

'Mr. Ruggles,' remarked Byrne impressively, 'it isn't given to every man to have a cousin as like him as two samples out o' the same bottle; barrin' ye were twins, which wudn't happen often. An' it isn't given to every man to meet that similar cousin promiscuous this way, the

day after the other fellow was laid out as stiff as I seen Dick Morley.'

'I suppose it must have an odd effect,' replied Ruggles with the air of a man who was tired of the subject. 'You've a fine show of grapes here.'

'I wish I'd as good a show to get them gathered,' replied Byrne.

'I'm sorry your vineyard isn't working,' said the younger man, sympathetically.

'An' faith, me frind,' retorted Byrne, 'av ye're any sorrier for that same nor I am, I'm afraid it has hurt yer appetite.'

'The place seems quite lonesome compared with the other vineyards I have seen,' remarked Ruggles.

'An' just now it ought to be as busy as a hive o' bees at swarming time,' replied Byrne. 'But it is what ye might call retired in an idle spell. The nearest house is where me overseer lives, half a mile away. The school children are picnickin' here to-day, but in a gineral way, it's a lonesome spot enough. I don't see where Mr. Field can be, though. He should be here writin' up the picnic.'

'Don't let me detain you, Mr. Byrne,' said

Ruggles. 'You told me you had to go to San Antonio to-day, and I suppose you ought soon to be starting?'

'Well, thank ye, Mr. Ruggles, av ye think ye can mek out widout me. I have to stop at the overseer's house and go over some accounts wid him afore I start. An' maybe I'll see Field there, and if I do I'll send him to ye.'

'Much obliged,' returned Ruggles. 'I'll get along first-rate. *Au revoir.*'

'The same to you and many of them,' replied Pat, climbing the terrace and plunging into the wilderness of vines.

'I'd like to put that fellow in a novel,' soliloquised Ruggles, as he picked a few grapes; 'he's the most pompous, good-hearted, shrewd, simple, fantastic creature it has ever been my lot to meet.'

And so pondering, Mr. Ruggles strolled off along the terraces, thereby just missing Mr. Chamberlain Field, who arrived post haste in search of him, and running past the corner of the vine-poles fairly stumbled over Haman Jeffries, who still lay half hidden in their shadow.

'Sakes alive!' exclaimed the editor, recoil-

ing a step. 'You've got a shocking bad habit of lying around under folk's feet of late. Dollett tells me he tumbled over you on the Plateau this morning.'

'I'm a little tired, Mr. Field,' returned Jeffries, rousing himself, and dusting small particles of clay from his black garments.

'And you were more than a little tired when Smith and Dollett struck you,' answered Field. 'Say, have you seen Mr. Ruggles anywhere around? I met the Hon. Pat just now and he told me he left him right here.'

'Who's Mr. Ruggles?' inquired the schoolmaster.

'Oh, come out of your dream!' returned the editor. 'Do you mean to say that you haven't heard of the San Francisco correspondent who arrived this morning?'

'I have heard that there was such a gentleman expected,' replied the schoolmaster, 'but I haven't seen him, and should not know him if I had.'

'Oh, yes, you would,' returned the editor. 'If you saw him, you couldn't fail to remark him. He's as like Dick Morley as two peas.'

'Like the murdered man?' cried Jeffries, startled.

'Exactly,' repeated the other. 'So like he might be the dead man come to life again.'

'The dead man come to life,' echoed Haman in an awe-stricken whisper. 'Do dead men ever come to life?'

'I guess not,' returned Mr. Field, 'at least not in my experience. I only used a figure of speech.'

'He might be the dead man come to life,' mused Jeffries in the same tone. 'So, Mr. Field, if you were to meet Richard Morley in the flesh, outside his own door, for instance, on the very rock he was shot from——'

'Is that what gave you your fit this morning?' broke in the editor. 'I heard the boys talking about it, and I thought you must have seen something.'

'If he pointed his finger at you,' pursued Jeffries, without heeding the interruption. 'If he spoke of his death—his murder——'

'Don't talk like that,' cried Field with a shiver. 'What awful ideas you have! You make my flesh creep.'

Jeffries' face was very pale; he was biting

his lip and clenching his hands spasmodically, wrestling with his gloomy thoughts as though they were some tangible foe.

'No, no!' he muttered at length, 'as you say, the dead never return. And if you met Richard Morley as you thought, you would have known that it could only have been this Mr. Ruggles, who bears such an extraordinary resemblance to him.'

'Of course,' replied Field; 'I should take the most natural and rational solution of any apparition.'

'Of course, of course!' assented Jeffries; 'so will I—I mean, so should I.'

'Besides,' added Field, 'a word or two would show Ruggles for what he was.'

'Ah, but the words were not such as Ruggles or any other stranger would use,' cried the schoolmaster eagerly. 'They were such as the dead man might have spoken if——'

'If what?' asked Field after waiting a moment in vain for the other to complete his sentence. 'What on earth are you talking about? Have you seen a ghost?'

Jeffries recovered himself with an effort.

'Never mind me,' he said with an attempt

at lightness. 'I am—I have been thinking and speculating.'

'Ah, that accounts,' rejoined the editor with a coarse laugh. 'I wasn't myself for a week after I dabbled in mining stock.'

Haman shivered slightly, but did not reply.

'Now look here, Jeffries,' pursued Field, not unkindly. 'You're ill and out of sorts. Try a drop of this,' and he produced a capacious flask from his pocket.

'Thank you, Mr. Field, I never drink,' answered the schoolmaster.

'Well, I do,' returned the editor, suiting the action to the word, and swallowing a generous draught of the liquor, 'and if you had more to do with spirits of this kind, and less with spirits of—of that other kind, it's my opinion you'd be a happier and a healthier man.'

Jeffries did not discuss the point.

'We will walk on, if you wish,' he said; 'we may meet Mr. Ruggles somewhere in the vineyard, and after what you have told me I confess I am curious to see him. Besides, I must look after the children. Miss Van Zandt has very kindly taken them away and is amusing them better than I could, I don't doubt; but I

must not impose on good-nature and leave them all day on her hands.'

'Oh, you can amuse kids with any man I ever saw,' rejoined Field, laughing; 'though how you do it puzzles me. I shouldn't think you were cut out for that sort of thing. Perhaps you tell them ghost stories.'

The two men moved off together, but Field stopped as he noticed Juan Estudillo sleeping under a bower of vines.

'There's that cussed greaser,' he cried. 'I wonder the fellow has the gall to show his nose here after what happened last week. Let's roust him out of that and give him a good scare and send him back to his hog-pen of a ranch where he belongs.'

'No, no, let him sleep,' remonstrated Jeffries, gently. 'The poor fellow's doing no harm there; and besides, his little girl is at the picnic and most likely he has come to look after her.'

'I don't think I'm doing my duty as a member of the Vigilance Committee in not seeing its sentences respected,' grumbled Field, yielding the point the more readily that he was personally somewhat afraid of the Mexican and saw that in the present case he could not count on the

schoolmaster's assistance. 'I don't see the use of a Committee at all, if it isn't going to assert itself. Here, first of all, is a greaser, warned out of the town for six months and back again within the week; and then Jack Scott let walk off with a rope round his neck, and the bloodiest murder that has ever stained San Pablo's annals goes unavenged.'

Jeffries stopped suddenly and gripped the other's arm.

'Unavenged! What do you mean?' he cried. 'Do you think Jack Scott has escaped? The roads should have been watched—the place should have been guarded—the——'

'Oh, no, I don't think that,' interrupted Field. 'He'll show up right enough. I saw him to-day, for the matter of that. But I don't think that the boys 'll feel like hanging him when they 've once let him go.'

'But they must, they shall,' shouted Jeffries, vehemently. 'They have sworn—they must remember their oaths. They will make themselves a laughing-stock to the whole community.'

'Well, no doubt, if any one takes the trouble to work them up to the point, they'll carry it

through,' replied Field, 'but I don't see who's going to do that.'

'Chamberlain Field,' said Jeffries, speaking with a concentration that bore down all opposition in the other's shallow nature, 'I tell you Richard Morley's death must be avenged, and no paltry compassion on the part of the Committee shall save Scott's life. He shall hang for that murder—you mark my words—I say, he shall hang for it!'

CHAPTER XIX

MR. RUGGLES had strolled in solitude for some distance along the terrace when he became conscious of footsteps and a rustling noise a few paces in front of him. He continued in the direction of the sound, and peeping through the leaves he saw a pretty picture.

Carrie Van Zandt, her eyes sparkling with enjoyment and her cheeks flushed with exercise, had sunk down in a vine-clad recess, where she gathered her muslin skirts into as small a compass as possible, disposed the branches so as to conceal the hiding-place she had chosen, and then, stifling her laughter as best she could, she lay silent but alert, peeping back every now and then with the quick, expectant glance proper to any hunted creature.

Miss Van Zandt had occupied Mr. Ruggles' thoughts a good deal for some time past, and he considered himself very fortunate to find her

thus couched in his path like a vineyard Dryad. He was in no hurry to advance, but stood and admired her for several minutes while he wondered what she could be about.

'She looks as if she were hiding from some one,' he pondered. 'It can't be from me, because she hasn't seen me.'

'Cuckoo!' cried Carrie musically, but Mr. Ruggles knew that this apparently irrelevant observation was not addressed to him, for the girl was still looking behind her.

'That's very odd,' he thought; 'if I were really the Californian she imagines me, I could turn round and have a fling at the peculiarities of "you New Yorkers," as she shows them.'

Then he scrambled through and under the interlacing vines, till he reached the alley in which the young lady was lurking. In spite of his efforts, his approach had been by no means noiseless, and Carrie was on the watch as he emerged.

'Hush, go away,' she cried as soon as she recognised the intruder. 'I'm hiding.'

'Are you?' returned Jimmy coolly. 'Then I've found you.'

'That's not fair,' she expostulated. 'You are not in the game.'

'Can't I come in?' he pleaded.

'The idea!' she cried, laughing and blushing; 'a great big man like you. Besides, you saw me hide. You can't find me.'

'On the contrary,' he argued; 'if I hadn't seen you hide, I probably couldn't have found you.'

'How you tease!' said Carrie petulantly.

'You know I expected to find you at the picnic,' he went on.

'Oh, then I suppose you're content?' she replied, 'though I'm sure I can't see what a man wants at a school-children's feast.'

'I'm supposed to be looking at the vineyard,' he explained.

'Oh, indeed! Why don't you look at it, then?' was the young lady's obvious retort.

'I prefer looking at you,' answered the journalist, no whit discomposed.

Carrie found herself baffled, and was constrained to change the subject.

'Oh, dear, those tiresome children!' she exclaimed; 'what an age they are! I do believe they've given me up.'

'You speak as if you were an intoxicant,' remarked Ruggles, smiling.

'Or a conundrum,' she retorted. 'Which am I?'

'Both, I think.'

'Neither, thank you.'

The conversation languished for a moment, and Carrie, discovering that a trim little buttoned gaiter was more visible than she considered it ought to be, drew it back under the protecting muslin.

'I suppose those children are looking for you,' remarked Ruggles, as the young voices came floating down among the terraces.

'Yes, the poor little oafs,' replied Carrie, 'in every direction but the right one. They are having a terrible search, and you have found me by standing still.'

'Excuse me,' he returned, 'I have looked for you longer than any of them.'

'Nonsense!' she exclaimed, honestly puzzled.

'No nonsense at all,' said Jimmy. 'I met you first in San Francisco, didn't I?'

'If you call that a meeting,' she replied with a laugh. 'Two dances and one ice all run to liquid.'

'No wonder; I was trying all the evening to melt the ice,' he returned.

'Well, apparently you succeeded.'

'I succeeded so far,' rejoined Ruggles, 'that I discovered that you were going to visit friends in Southern California.'

'A great discovery, truly,' remarked Miss Van Zandt with a contemptuous air that was, perhaps, a little overdone.

'That's what I thought,' responded Jimmy; 'and accordingly I set to work to convince our managing editor that the "Summons" had too long neglected a great and growing industry of the state.'

'What on earth has that to do with me?' asked Carrie, opening her blue eyes in unaffected bewilderment.

'It was three days after I met you at the ball that I was detailed to write up the vineyards,' explained the journalist.

Carrie could not help looking pleased, though she endeavoured to conceal it by an affectation of incredulity.

'Not really?' she exclaimed. 'Do you mean to tell me that our meeting on the Orvietas coach was not chance?'

'No more chance than our meeting at San Pablo,' he replied coolly.

'Well, I'm sure!' exclaimed Carrie.

'Are you? I wish I were.'

'Certainly you Californians are the most extraordinary people,' remarked the girl.

'So you see,' went on Ruggles, 'I am better entitled to find you than any of those children, who have only been looking for you for a few minutes.'

Miss Van Zandt found her entrenchments were being carried one after another by this very straightforward young man. She tried evasion.

'They are such nice children, if you only knew them.'

'And I am such a nice young man, if you only knew me.'

'You Californians are the most conceited people in the world,' retorted Carrie, falling back on her favourite formula.

'No wonder,' rejoined Ruggles briskly; 'look at the climate we live in!'

'Well, you didn't make it,' said the girl.

'Granted,' replied the journalist; 'but we advertise it.'

This calm assumption seemed to try Miss Van Zandt's patience.

'That's just like you again,' she remarked. 'No one ever heard a New Yorker boast of his climate.'

'For obvious and sufficient reasons,' he retorted. 'Who'd boast of a climate where the thermometer ranges from ten below zero to a hundred in the shade?'

'Bother the thermometer.'

'Certainly,' acquiesced Ruggles; 'when I lived in New York it frequently bothered me.'

'Have you ever lived in New York?' she asked, somewhat surprised.

He nodded.

'You never told me that,' pursued the young lady.

'You never asked me,' he replied.

'How long did you live there?' inquired Carrie.

'Off and on for about twenty-six years,' he answered with exasperating calmness.

'What on earth do you mean?' asked Miss Van Zandt, mentally endeavouring to subtract a quarter of a century from the youthful face and

figure before her, and considerably puzzled by the apparent result.

'I was born there, and there I lived most of my life,' explained Ruggles.

'Now, Mr. Ruggles,' said Carrie, rising indignantly, 'I call that real mean. How dare you pose as a genuine Californian, as a——'

'As a product of the glorious climate?' interrupted the journalist, laughing. 'I did nothing of the sort. You included me in your criticism of "you Californians," and I was too polite to contradict a lady.'

'I've a great mind never to speak to you again,' said Carrie; but she resumed her seat in her vine-clad nest.

'Because I'm not a Californian?' expostulated Jimmy. 'Don't be so cruel. I've been on the coast for six years, and I vote here.'

The voices of the children, which had floated down at intervals from the upper terraces, now sounded nearer and nearer. The little ones were apparently searching the alley in which Miss Van Zandt was hidden, and the shouts and laughter swelled in volume and distinctness. The pack was evidently in full cry.

'Now they'll find me to a certainty,' remarked Carrie.

'Yes, worse luck,' replied Ruggles. 'I wonder if I couldn't go and throw them off on a false scent?'

'You mustn't do anything of the sort. They've had a long search and they deserve to find me,' said Carrie.

Mr. Ruggles appeared undecided; but the next moment the whole band appeared dashing along the terrace, and led by young Byrne.

The boy's quick eyes detected Miss Van Zandt's light dress in an instant.

'There she is, there she is!' he cried; 'and she isn't hidden a bit.'

'That's because she's found,' remarked Ruggles with a superior smile.

'Who found her?' cried Pat eagerly.

'I had that pleasure,' replied the journalist.

Miss Van Zandt dreaded the next question, and when it came it froze her with horror.

'Have you kissed her yet?'

'Little boy, hold your tongue,' cried Carrie indignantly.

Ruggles smothered a laugh and looked mischievous.

'Is that part of the game?' he asked.

'That's what she said,' replied the unabashed Pat. 'She got up the game.'

'You awful child!' exclaimed Carrie. 'If you say another word I'll box your ears.'

'Far be it from me to dispute the arrangements of the fair mistress of the revels,' said Ruggles, advancing a step.

'Mr. Ruggles! How dare you? That's enough!'

'But I haven't begun yet,' replied the incorrigible Ruggles.

Carrie was fairly at bay. Her cheeks were crimson, and she had drawn back as far as she could into the little recess among the vines. It was an embarrassing situation, but the girl was so fully alive to its ludicrous side that it was with difficulty she could command her countenance so as to affect anger, and any attempt at dignity was out of the question.

'You naughty children,' she cried to Pat Byrne and his companions, who had formed a ring outside and stood looking on, grinning broadly, 'there's nothing to laugh at;' and as she said it she laughed herself.

Ruggles came forward into the arbour.

'Now, Mr. Ruggles,' she remonstrated, 'I shall be very angry.'

Mr. Ruggles caught her outstretched hand and kissed it.

'I must be content to compromise on this,' he remarked.

She snatched her hand indignantly away.

'How dare you?' she cried. 'What do you take me for?'

'I'd like to take you for better or worse.'

He was very close to her, and there was an earnest ring in his voice, and a serious meaning in his eyes which did not escape Miss Van Zandt. Her laugh was a little forced as she replied:

'You'd better take care what you say or I may take you at your word.'

Ruggles kept up the fiction of jest, but the graver emotion showed through his playfulness.

'You have wonderfully taking ways, and this will be the happiest day of my life if they will really lead you so far.'

Miss Van Zandt's eyes fell, and her reply was inaudible. Pat Byrne looked on critically from a little distance.

'They're sparking,' he remarked.

'Are they really?' inquired Carmelita, with open-eyed interest.

'You bet they are,' returned young Pat dogmatically. '*I* know. By-and-by when I've time I'll show you how it's done. Come on; let's hide and seek again. We'll get no more good of her to-day.'

Young Byrne was right. Carrie Van Zandt's interest in the picnic was over. When the children had scattered again among the terraces she walked slowly home across the vineyard with Ruggles, and the westering sun, as it bathed the foothills with its radiance, saw no happier couple in all California.

CHAPTER XX

'Cuckoo!' cried little Carmelita, peeping out between the bars of the heavy gate. She had selected Mr. Byrne's wine vault as a cool and altogether suitable hiding-place, and had crept in, pulling the grated door behind her. Now she began to fear that she had been needlessly successful in concealing herself, for, though the terraces resounded with the children's voices, no one came near her. She did not wish to escape detection—she was even willing to be found soon, especially if young Byrne were the discoverer, but if no one came near her, where was the fun of hiding at all?

So little Carmelita cried 'Cuckoo!' and scanned the limited area visible from her lair with eager eyes.

The first figures that crossed her range of vision were those of Field and Jeffries. They

came along one of the terraces, and on reaching the open space in front of the vault they halted and looked about them.

'I believe that young Ruggles has gone home,' remarked Field. 'I've been over half the vineyard and seen no sign of him.'

'Very likely,' replied Jeffries indifferently. 'I must get the children together now. They're to have tea at the overseer's house and go home from there. It's time they started.'

'Cuckoo!' cried Carmelita, who was waxing wofully impatient.

'They're round here now,' said Field. 'I heard one of them just then.'

Carmelita's signal had at last reached the ears it was intended for, and young Byrne dashed into the glade with half a dozen youngsters at his heels.

'I heard her,' shouted Pat. 'She must be round here somewhere.'

'There's Mr. Jeffries,' cried another boy. 'Say Mr. Jeffries, have you seen Carmelita?'

'Shut up!' commanded Pat. ''Taint fair to ask questions. Every one for himself. That's what my pa says.'

The children scattered among the vines in

eager search, but were soon brought back by a view-halloo from young Pat.

'There she is! I've found her, kids. Come out, Carmelita!'

Carmelita, nothing loth, attempted to obey, and pushed with all her strength against the gate, but it resisted her efforts.

'I can't,' said the child. 'I can't open the door.'

'Why, you've never been and pulled that gate to, have you?' cried Pat, with evident concern. 'It has a catch-lock, and my pa says there ain't a key in San Pablo will open it, except his own.'

This discouraging information wrung a doleful cry from the little Mexican.

'Oh, Pat, let me out, please,' she sobbed. 'I'm afraid.'

Mr. Jeffries heard the cry and came quickly to the gate.

'What's the matter?' he asked. 'Have you got shut in, Carmelita? Don't cry, dear; we'll soon get you out.'

'That you won't, I'm afraid,' said young Pat. 'No one has a key but Pop.'

'We can send to him and get it, can't we?' asked Jeffries.

'But he's gone to San Antonio,' replied the boy.

'This is very awkward,' said the schoolmaster, with added gravity of manner. 'But clearly the child can't be left here all the afternoon.'

'Mr. Byrne may not have started yet,' interposed Field. 'He was on his way to the overseer's house not a great while ago.'

'Run, Byrne, run,' cried Jeffries.

'Oh, please run, and run fast,' urged Carmelita, who had been listening to the discussion of her prospects with very intelligible interest.

Young Pat was off like a shot.

'Go by the road,' Field shouted after him 'If he has started, you may meet him before he passes the vineyard gate.'

Jeffries reached through the bars and took the little prisoner's hand in his.

'Now, my dear, you mustn't fret or worry,' he said very gently, 'you'll get out in a few minutes.'

'But if I don't get out,' sobbed Carmelita.

'Well, if you don't, I'll stay here and keep

you company till you do,' replied the schoolmaster.

'And tell me stories?' asked the child eagerly.

'If you like,' he answered.

The other children grouped down to the entrance of the vault. Evidently, Mr. Jeffries' narratives were popular in his own circle.

'Tell us the story of the wicked man who let his enemy drown and was haunted by his ghost every night at twelve o'clock.'

Field shouted with laughter.

'Eh, schoolmaster,' he cried, 'I thought I sized up your pull with the kids pretty near right. Go ahead with your ghost story. That last new one you were telling me was a corker!'

Haman Jeffries evidently did not like the interruption.

'Nonsense, Field,' he said brusquely; 'you don't know what children like, or what's fit for them to hear. I'll tell you a pretty fairy story, my dear.'

'Then I pass,' remarked Field, strolling back on the terrace. 'I've no use for fairy tales.'

He stopped suddenly, and called back. 'Here's young Pat coming as fast as he can lay

leg to ground. We'll have the news of it now.'

This announcement banished all desire for the story from Carmelita's mind.

'Can you see him?' she cried. 'Oh, look! Tell me, has he got the key?'

'We'll know in a moment, dear,' said the schoolmaster, still soothing her.

In fact, at that instant, young Pat appeared wofully out of breath.

'It's all right,' he panted—'I found—Pop. Met him just at the gate. Two—seconds more and—he'd have passed. Brace up, Carmelita, you'll be out—in a—minute.'

'Well done, my boy,' said Jeffries, patting the lad's shoulder. 'You ran famously.'

'There ain't another kid in San Pablo can live with me for one or two hundred yards,' said the youngster proudly.

Mr. Byrne now came into sight, moving at a more dignified pace. He walked straight up to the vault, and, unlocking the gate, released the little girl, who was immediately overwhelmed with congratulations by her playfellows.

'Now, Carmelita,' said young Pat, 'I found you, you know,' and he forthwith exacted the

[redacted] while the little maid rendered [redacted]

[redacted] and you found your pa [redacted] the inn. You may have another for that.'

But while the proffered reward [redacted] his mother resumed the conversation in the [redacted]

'With all the submission in [redacted] Mr Jeffries. I keep the children out [redacted] as I were in your place. Another minute or two and I'd be half a mile in the road to the Assizes, an' how I ye have got the poor child out this, I'd like to know?'

'It was an accident, sir,' explained Jeffries. 'It shan't occur again.'

'I want the door left open, anyhow,' pursued the Hon. Pat, 'for the place is empty, an' this slack time's a good chance o' gettin' it cleaned out. But the vineyard's big, and yez can find some other part to play in. D'ye mind that, Pat?'

'Yes, sir,' answered his son.

'You'll be goin' to tay soon, anyhow,' pursued Mr. Byrne, consulting his watch. 'It's risin' five o'clock.'

'I am a thousand times obliged for the

trouble you have taken, Mr. Byrne,' said Jeffries with a bow.

'Ye're intirely welcome,' answered the Hon. Pat. 'Only kape the young ones away from here. It was wan chance in tin Pat cot me, an' av he hadn't, the little girl might ha' stayed here all night.'

At this appalling possibility Carmelita set up a terrified howl.

'Sooner than that should have happened,' remarked Jeffries, 'I think I would have taken it upon myself to have the vault broken open.'

'An' ye'd have found that same no aisy job,' retorted the Hon. Pat. 'It's built as strong as stone and cimmint can mek it, an' ye can see what the gate is fer yersilf. Howsumdever, the little girl's on the right side of it now, an' it'll be her own fault av she gits on the wrong side of it agin.'

He returned the key to his pocket, and joined Field, who still lingered on the terrace, stopping to chuck Carmelita under the chin as he passed, and recommend her to keep out of mischief for the future. As he turned away, Mr. Jeffries called on the children for three cheers in honour of Mr. Byrne, which were given

with a will, the youngsters remembering the feast of grapes they had enjoyed during the day, as well as his recent service to one of their number.

The Hon. Pat, to whose nostrils the incense of applause and popularity was infinitely sweet, let it come from what quarter it would, paused and raised his hat with elaborate courtesy before descending the terraces with Field toward the vineyard entrance. Young Pat, who felt himself the hero of the moment in a degree second only to his father, imitated the old gentleman's gesture of acknowledgment with a ludicrous precision which caused the schoolmaster to smile, and set all the children cheering again.

'Now, young ladies and gentlemen,' cried Jeffries in his official tone, 'it is nearly five o'clock, and we have half a mile to walk to the overseer's house for tea. Fall in, if you please.'

There was a little reluctance as the youngsters prepared to turn their backs on the unwonted pleasures of the vineyard, but not much; for, though Jeffries was very popular amongst them, his discipline was good, and the children knew when an order was intended to be obeyed. They formed in ranks as they had

marched to the picnic, a dusty, tired, happy band. The schoolmaster delegated Pat Byrne to precede the line, as he was thoroughly familiar with the various terraces, which the majority of the children was not. The boy accepted the office with no small pride and reviewed his charges critically.

'Dress to the front, Harry Smith. If I'm going to lead this gang, this gang has got to look like something. Tie your shoe, Mamie Dollett. Do you suppose I'm going to have any such scarecrow as you walking through my Pop's vineyard? Now, come along, all together.'

Young Byrne had a fair alto voice, and he struck up the stirring military song, 'Marching through Georgia.' The children took their time from him, and moved off along the terrace, keeping step to the inspiriting strains.

Jeffries lingered a moment and watched the little column defile along the leafy path. The fresh, young voices sounded pleasantly on the summer air; the sun was resting broad and bright on the western slope of the foot-hills, and the mounting terraces, with their lines of luxuriant vegetation spangled with the purple and crimson of the ripe grapes, shimmered in the

afternoon heat. The world seemed a fair place, even to Haman Jeffries, who still wrestled vaguely with the dark doubt that had come to him with the early morning. It was just twelve hours since he had seen Richard Morley's ghost on the rocky platform whence the murderer's bullet had hurled him. The spectre had never left Haman Jeffries through the long hours of that day of pleasure and merry-making. Its denouncing words had never ceased to ring in his ears. Since dawn he had moved and spoken like a man in a dream. Those around him had noticed nothing. The schoolmaster had seemed to them the schoolmaster they had always known — visionary, fantastic, unaccountable. But Jeffries himself, after an effort to reconcile the apparition with the living world through the medium of that wonderful resemblance which every one told him Ruggles bore to the murdered man, abandoned the attempt in despair. A voice from the grave had spoken to him; a cry from the world of spirits had reached him. Dick Morley dead had stepped between Haman and Kate with a vigour and authority which Dick Morley living had never assumed. To a man of Jeffries' beliefs and tendencies, to realise this was

to realise despair, and yet he could not give up Kate.

Fate was dealing hardly by him for the moment, but his destiny—the destiny which he believed in—must triumph in the end.

The clear voices of the children floated to him on the evening air. He roused himself with an impatient start; the duties of the moment claimed him. He turned to follow, but was stopped by a figure which stepped down on the terrace from amongst the vines, and laid a detaining hand on his arm.

'Mr. Jeffries, a word with you,' said Jack Scott.

CHAPTER XXI

KATE MORLEY sat in her lonely home, weary and dispirited. The day was very long to her—longer than the night had been, and the echoes of mirth and light-hearted talk that reached her as the merry-makers passed the house on their way to the picnic were in sad contrast to her dark thoughts.

She had arranged all her plans. Mr. Smith had agreed to take the contents of the store off her hands at a valuation, and she was ready to leave San Pablo on the following day. There was nothing to detain her but her husband's funeral, which was to take place on the morrow, and her anxiety about Scott, and his fate would be decided by midnight. Life looked very dull and leaden-hued to her as she sat and listened to the children's voices as the merry groups raced up the road; and she found a melancholy satisfaction in the reflection which often occurred to her that

in all human probability her days could not be very long in the service to which she had devoted herself. A nurse in the Memphis yellow fever hospitals! It was almost a sentence of death, and as such Kate welcomed it.

The position of Jack Scott occasioned her far more anxiety than did her own. It never occurred to Mrs. Morley to doubt that the Vigilantes, whom she had seen only in their attitude of grim determination as they marched to their vengeance, could relent and leave their purpose unfulfilled. Byrne and many others were of opinion that, having once released their prey, the Avengers would scarcely renew their passion and proceed to extremities, but Kate did not know this. She never doubted that Jack's life would be forfeited if, within the narrow and fast vanishing margin of time allowed him, he did not produce the murderer. So she sat and pondered how she could help him—sometimes weeping, sometimes praying; and often crimson with shame and mortification as she asked herself why young Scott filled so large a space in her thoughts. She would not acknowledge that she loved him. Her womanly pride fought down the idea as often as it arose, but she could not

quell the bursts of unacknowledged tenderness that swept over her as she recalled his many deeds of kindness; his uniformly chivalrous respect for her unhappy position, his manly, honest face, which she had always seen set unflinchingly toward the right. Jack Scott was the hero of Kate's heart, even if he had been thrust down from his pinnacle as hero of San Pablo.

The laughter of the picnic parties died away and the road was deserted as the afternoon wore on, and still Kate sought for some means to save the man she loved—the man whom she knew could never be hers, since his heart had long since been laid at the feet of Lucy. And yet there was no sacrifice Kate Morley would have shrunk from if she could thereby have cleared Scott's name and freed him from peril. She was sure, with a conviction nothing could shake, that Haman Jeffries had shot her husband; but it was not enough to know this thing—she must prove it.

This man—this Jeffries—how she shuddered at the thought of him!—loved her in his own crazed fashion. She wondered if she could play Delilah to this monstrous Samson. Even this she would have done to save Jack's life. But

she felt rather than knew that the sacrifice would be useless. Even if her nerve did not fail her in the ordeal, Haman Jeffries was not the man to let a vital secret escape him. He would preach fate and claim her in right of predestination, swearing that all had been appointed beforehand, and that there was nothing to call for acknowledgment or reward.

The test whereby she had hoped Jeffries' conscience would be terrified into self-betrayal had failed. A dreamer of dreams and a seer of visions had beheld an apparition and had been stricken senseless at the sight. How could she hope to find in these rude villagers the profound psychology which would trace the line between guilt and terror? She could not determine it herself, save through the intuition supplied by her conviction. She let her hands fall on her lap with a weary sigh.

Presently she started to her feet. The sun was low and the shadow of the chaparral stretched almost into the gully. Kate accused herself of wasting time. If all Jack's friends were to spend the precious hours of his reprieve in purposeless wonderings, what chance had he of escape? She would go to work. She would

try something, anything, everything, while it was yet day. She caught up her hat and, fastening the door behind her, took the road to the village.

It had been a long and anxious day for Lucy, too, at the San Pablo House. Carrie found her friend in no receptive mood for the important confidence she had to bestow, and sought her own room to enjoy her bright day-dreams in solitude. Mr. Starkweather had been restless and irritable, complaining of the doctor's folly in keeping him in bed when there was no necessity. He was anxious to get up and do something, and he twitted Lucy with showing small regard for her affianced husband, since she remonstrated with her father for wishing to get up and help him. Mr. Starkweather also failed to understand why Jack had not called to see him, and here Lucy was at one with him. She confessed to herself that it would have been very pleasant if the young fellow had only looked in; but he had not appeared, and Miss Starkweather was fain to make the best of it. Toward five o'clock the Sheriff would be gainsaid no longer, but rose and dressed himself; and Dr. Meares, who was

hastily summoned by the alarmed Lucy when her father's stubbornness passed beyond her control, confessed that he seemed none the worse for the change.

Another battle ensued when Mr. Starkweather called for his hat and insisted on going out; and here, too, Lucy would have been forced to succumb had not a sudden diversion been made in her favour by the appearance of Mrs. Morley.

Kate was anxious and disquieted, and soon communicated her misgivings to the Sheriff, who was little accustomed to inaction when anything of importance required attention. He had hoped that Mrs. Morley brought some news of Scott, and when he found this was not the case he became the more set in his determination to go and see for himself. So, after further ineffectual remonstrance from Lucy, he left the hotel and the two women remained together.

It was now almost dark, and the Plaza wore its customary evening aspect. The picnic was over and the children had dispersed to their homes, while every store-front and verandah had its knot of men, smoking, chatting, and idling in the twilight. Starkweather sought for

Mr. Byrne, but learned that he had gone to San Antonio earlier in the afternoon and was not expected back till the next day. The Spread Eagle was open, however, and doing its regular trade, but neither there nor elsewhere could the Sheriff obtain any recent information of Jack Scott or his movements. Indeed, he soon ceased his inquiries when he found that their only result was to intensify a sullen, suspicious spirit in the men.

The town was much quieter than it had been on the previous evening, but it was evident that some influence inimical to young Scott was in the air, and doing silent, secret work against him. Gradually the groups drew together, and when it spread abroad, as it quickly did, that no one had seen Jack for several hours, muttered oaths were heard and dark scowls settled on bearded faces. The Avengers, who had been quiet all day, grew fiercer as the impression was born in upon them that they had been tricked and deceived. Before nine o'clock the conviction was general that Jack Scott had forfeited his parole and had fled across the mountains.

Inquiries were made at the livery stable and from such as owned horses, but it could not be

ascertained that either steed or waggon was missing, except Mr. Byrne's pair of bays with which he had driven to San Antonio. The impression prevailed at first that the Hon. Pat had conveyed the accused man out of town; but Field, who had seen his employer start from the vineyard, asserted that he had gone alone. So the Vigilantes roamed about the town, inflaming their passions with strong drink, and unhesitatingly searching any house or place where they thought there was a possibility that the fugitive might lurk. At each fresh disappointment their anger rose, and the temper of the men was rapidly mounting to the murderous pitch of the night before.

The dark form of Jeffries flitted from group to group, and Starkweather readily detected his influence in the tone of the remarks that reached his ear.

'I wish Jack Scott would show himself, if it were only for five minutes,' the Sheriff muttered half aloud, as he turned from the Spread Eagle, where he had been listening for a few moments to the remarks of those within.

'The best thing for him, you bet,' said a voice, answering the thought which Sam Stark-

weather was hardly conscious of having spoken. 'If Jack has tried to dodge this Committee and slips up now, it will be all day with him.'

The Sheriff turned and saw Judge Boone at his elbow.

'I'm mighty glad to see you out and around again, Sam,' went on the Judge. 'I tell you, it gave me a turn I won't get over in a hurry when I saw you keel over last night.'

'More by good luck than good guidance that I didn't keel over for good and all,' returned the Sheriff. 'Now, look at here, Boone,' he went on; 'I'm willing to overlook what happened last night, as no harm came of it; but if there's any more of it—I know the names of the biggest half of that gang, and I'll jail every mother's son of you, as sure as there's law in California.'

Boone laughed lightly.

'Ye'll have to build a fence around San Pablo and jail the whole town,' he said, 'for we're all in it. But I don't suppose there'll be much more trouble. Jack's made tracks, there can't be a doubt of it. I didn't believe it of the young fellow, but life's a stake worth stacking the cards for, I guess.'

'I don't believe he has gone,' returned the Sheriff; 'at any rate, no one has a right to say he has till 11.30 this night; but if he is gone, do you know what you and yourselves have left yourselves liable to, Boone?'

'No; 'tain't any fault of ours, is it?' asked the Judge.

'You've interfered with an officer of the law in the discharge of his duty and set his prisoner at liberty; that's what you've done,' returned the Sheriff; and, having fired this parting shot, he sheered off without waiting for a return.

Judge Boone watched him as he moved across the Plaza, a tall, erect, stalwart figure, emphatically a man whom such men could not but respect.

'He's clear grit,' muttered the Judge with a smile on his lips and an almost affectionate expression in his eyes; 'he's sand right through, d——n me if he ain't.'

And with this tribute to Starkweather's virtues, Boone passed in and joined the group at the bar of the Spread Eagle.

So the night wore away. Haman Jeffries was

untiring in his canvass; going from one knot of men to another, and pointing out with all the eloquence at his command the black ingratitude and treachery of which Jack had been guilty in breaking his word. Field and Smith were equally indefatigable. Boone appeared to have lost all interest in the proceedings. He had tacitly resigned his position as leader, and seemed content to be a looker-on. The Sheriff's words had produced little effect on him, but the Sheriff's narrow escape the previous night had sobered him.

As for Starkweather, he returned to the hotel, and his anxious, harassed looks did not escape the notice of Kate Morley and his daughter; but he evaded their questions for some time. At length, when Lucy had left the room for a few minutes, he gave Kate, whom he regarded as a comparatively uninterested party, his view of the situation.

'The mob is getting to be as bad as it was last night, if not worse. Haman Jeffries and others have been working it up, and they've done it to the Queen's taste. If Jack Scott's in San Pablo to-night, I'm afraid he's no better than a dead man. If he's cleared out, of course

—but I don't think he has. He's acted like a d——d fool in lying low and sneaking away like this. If he'd come forward and mixed with the boys and talked the thing over freely, I don't believe they'd have got six men in town to lay a hand on him ; but it's too late now.'

Lucy returned, and Sam, laying his finger on his lips, intimated to Kate that what he had told her was not intended for his daughter's ears. But the Sheriff's view of the case had produced little impression on Mrs. Morley. From the first she had never entertained the possibility of the mob's relenting, and at this moment she was happier and more hopeful than she had been during the whole day.

An idea had suddenly occurred to her. She fancied she saw the dim outlines of a plan by which Jack's innocence might be established and his life preserved. The execution of her scheme called for a certain sacrifice on her own part, but Kate did not heed that. She rather gloried in it. If young Scott were to be saved, she would prefer that he should be saved at her expense.

And so the evening passed, the Sheriff going out every half-hour or so, but always returning

shortly and with an added gloom in his manner.

A little before eleven o'clock the Avengers formed in line, and started, under the leadership of Field and Smith, to keep their ghastly tryst with Jack Scott at Lone Pine Knob.

CHAPTER XXII

If Sheriff Starkweather had crossed Mr. Byrne's vineyard a few hours earlier, he would have been at no loss to account for Jack Scott's non-appearance that night in the village. The picnic party in ordered ranks had started for the overseer's house under young Pat's guidance. The voices of the children swelled across the summer evening in the stirring cadence of their military march; the westering sun, as it sank lower, darted level beams over the patches of shadow which lay beneath the vines, and the intrusive light fell on Juan Estudillo's closed eyelids and caused him to stir in his sleep.

Very faintly through the distance came the low, monotonous boom of the Pacific, moaning far below on its yellow sands, and the vineyard on the foot-hills looked as solitary and deserted, and as peaceful and beautiful, as Eden may

have seemed when man was driven from the gates.

Deserted, save for Juan muttering in his dreams and striving unconsciously to turn his head from the light, and burrow deeper into the recess where he lay hidden; solitary, save for those two men who stood gazing into each other's eyes, as gladiators may have gazed before closing for the death grapple.

For Jack Scott's touch as he laid a detaining hand on the schoolmaster's arm—the tone of his voice as he uttered the simple phrase, 'Mr. Jeffries, a word with you'—seemed to have turned the other for a moment to stone.

With a visible effort Haman recovered himself and shook off Jack's hand as he might have shaken off a noxious reptile.

'I hold no communication with people of your character. Out of my way, sir!'

He attempted to push past, but Jack still barred the way. 'Oh, Jeffries, Jeffries,' cried Scott, in a tone half bantering, half sorrowful, 'take care what you are saying!'

'And why should I care?' demanded the schoolmaster, his pale cheek flushing for a moment as if stung by the other's words.

'Because,' pursued Jack in the same tone—'because I am accused of murder.'

'An excellent reason for avoiding your society. Stand aside, sir!'

'And I am innocent,' Jack continued, foiling by his mere attitude the other's attempt to withdraw.

'So you say,' retorted Jeffries.

'I do more than say it,' replied Jack; 'I shall soon prove it, for I know the guilty man.'

Jeffries was visibly startled.

'You know—pshaw! I do not believe you,' he added, recovering himself.

'I do not lie, as you well know,' returned Jack, speaking slowly and with concentrated force, so that the words fell one by one on Jeffries' ears, and seemed each to make its separate impression on his brain; 'and I say to you now that from beginning to end you have been my worst enemy.'

'What if I have?' broke in Jeffries passionately, as if losing all control of himself; 'what if I have? Have not you come between me and the dearest desire of my heart? Have not you stepped between me and the sunshine of my life, lightly, wantonly, for no benefit nor advantage

to yourself? You have made ruin of a soul that you cannot even understand, and for that—for that, mark you—not for the death of that poor drunkard, you shall hang.'

Very faintly, very sweetly the chorus of the children floated down the terraces and filled the momentary pause that followed the schoolmaster's vehement denunciation.

'What have I done to you? What do you mean?' inquired Jack, perplexed and startled by the unmistakable ring of sincerity in the man's voice. But Jeffries' mood had changed.

'Let me pass; I have nothing to say to you,' he said sullenly.

'But I have much to say to you,' retorted Scott, coming closer to him. 'Look me in the eye, Haman Jeffries! Now accuse me of the murder of that man if you dare!'

The schoolmaster shrank back, apparently cowed by the other's threatening manner.

'It is not I who accuse you,' he muttered. 'Blame the evidence, not me. Look at the quarrel, the place, the pistol——'

'Liar and coward!' shouted Jack. 'You are my most persistent accuser, and I am going to tell you why. The blood of the victim is crying

aloud for vengeance, and you dare not rest till that cry is satisfied. For it was your hand, Haman Jeffries, and none other, that took Richard Morley's life.'

The schoolmaster started violently, and the blood rushed to his face, and then ebbing left it ghastly white. He clutched convulsively at his throat and made two or three efforts to speak before the words would come.

'I—I—' he gasped; and then, collecting himself with a visible effort, he screamed shrilly, 'You lie!'

'I do not lie,' retorted Jack. 'Do you think no eye but God's saw you when you grovelled in your terror before the phantom your own guilty conscience had conjured up? Did you suppose there was no human ear to listen to your self-accusing words?'

'What did I say?' demanded Jeffries eagerly; and then, recollecting himself, he went on more boldly, 'I did not utter a word. What trick is this? This is the foundation of your attack on me, is it? Why, every man in San Pablo knows that my nerves are weak. That is no hanging matter, I'm sure. I met Mr. Morley's cousin unexpectedly and was startled—terrified,

if you will, as every other man has been who has had an opportunity to notice the extraordinary resemblance. Is this the tale that you will carry to the Vigilantes? Am I the murderer you will produce in your place? Are those the proofs of my crime? Why, man, they will laugh at you.'

Jack was shaken for a moment by this fluent exposure of the plan on which he had counted so much; but as Jeffries repeated, 'they will laugh at you,' himself laughing as if in prophetic sympathy, the young fellow recovered sufficiently to reply resolutely—

'I do not think so.

'Try it, if you like,' went on the schoolmaster, 'but I will discount your story. I will tell them myself of the supposed apparition and my terror. They will have a good laugh at poor Ham Jeffries, who thought he saw a ghost; but you,' he added with vindictive emphasis, 'you will hang.'

'I do not think so,' repeated Jack stoutly.

'Perhaps you mean to forfeit your word,' sneered Jeffries. 'The appointment at Lone Pine Knob is still seven hours off. Perhaps your heart is failing you.'

'I shall keep the appointment,' Jack replied, with perfect calmness, 'with the murderer or without him.'

'Then I shall see you there?' said Jeffries exultantly.

'You shall,' cried Jack, 'and you shall hear me tell the Committee all I know and all I suspect. They shall have my version of the apparition you now affect to ridicule; I shall tell them in more detail the story of the pistol, as I had it from Morley. I shall accuse you of the murder, and I shall call on Mrs. Morley to testify to the motive.'

Scott's last words were wrung from him by his desire to make his case as complete as possible in the schoolmaster's eyes, and had no other foundation than his recollection of what Kate had said when the little group had watched for the dawn in the house on the Plateau, and they had endeavoured to connect Jeffries with the crime.

'He had a motive—what men call a strong motive,' Mrs. Morley had said, and, with the memory of those words strong in him, Jack threatened to call her as a witness. He did not expect to gain much by this menace, but its effect was immediate and startling.

The two were standing near the top of the few steps that led down to Byrne's wine vault, the gate of which remained open as the Irishman had left it after releasing Carmelita. As Scott recounted the means by which he hoped to convince the Committee, Jeffries listened, with the evil sneer deepening on his face; but when Kate's name was mentioned, when Jack said, 'I shall call Mrs. Morley to testify to your motive,' Haman uttered a hoarse cry, and, leaping forward, flung young Scott down the steps with a strength astonishing in so slight a man. Then he slammed the gate, and in a voice of concentrated fury hissed:

'You shall tell them nothing.'

Jack was so completely taken by surprise that resistance was impossible. He had been standing close to the top of the steps, and the schoolmaster's sudden assault had been sufficient to send him headlong to the bottom. The fall was inconsiderable, and the young man was not hurt; but before he could pick himself up the gate was closed, and he found himself a prisoner.

He flung himself furiously against the bars and shook them with the strength of despair.

'Go on, try your muscles on that iron,' cried Jeffries with a taunting laugh. 'You are Mr. Byrne's manager. You should know how strong it is.'

'Open the gate!' roared Jack. 'Help! help!'

'Shout, call,' sneered Jeffries. 'There is not a soul within a mile of you. There are no labourers here. The children have gone. You know yourself how lonely this vineyard is, and night is falling. You may call in vain on heaven or hell!'

'Devil!' cried Jack, straining at the bars with impotent fury.

'I might have killed you instead of flinging you down there,' pursued Jeffries. 'I had my knife handy and you were within reach—you who have darkened and spoiled my life. Perhaps I should have done so; but you made me angry, and one cannot think of everything.'

'Go on, what matters one murder more?' murmured Jack as he sank down exhausted by his efforts.

'I haven't a pistol, I'm sorry to say,' went on Jeffries with exasperating coolness. 'But it

does not matter. You will miss your appointment with the Vigilantes, but they will not miss you. Recollect your terms. If you forfeit your word you are to be shot on sight, and you will die dishonoured. You will be dragged out of the hole you have chosen for a hiding-place, and killed like a rat.'

Jack sprang to his feet and grasped the bars again. The mingled anguish and fury on his face made his persecutor recoil.

'Ay, struggle,' said Jeffries. 'I have you safe, I think. That vault is strong, and the key is in the pocket of Pat Byrne, and he is in San Antonio. So a pleasant night to you, Jack Scott, and a happy release in the morning.'

He turned away, taking no further notice of the young man's wild ravings and impotent struggles.

As the schoolmaster crossed the open ground he came face to face with Juan Estudillo, yawning and rubbing his eyes, and looking even more stupid than usual.

Jeffries went straight up to him and forced him backward to a point whence the entrance to the vault was invisible, and at which the outcries of the prisoner—but he was quiet for

the moment—had some chance of passing unnoticed.

'What are you doing here, you cursed greaser?' demanded Jeffries furiously. 'I thought you had been warned to keep away?'

'I come for my *pobre cita*—Carmelita,' explained Juan. 'The Señor himself said to me to come.'

'Ah, so I did,' answered Haman. 'Well, Carmelita is at the overseer's with the other children. Come; I'll take you with me, and see you start for home from there. No skulking or hanging back,' he added sternly, as the Mexican appeared about to take a course that would bring him in view of the gate.

'But, Señor, the way to the overseer's is——'

'It is the way I choose to take,' said Jeffries. 'March!'

The two men passed along the terrace at the back of the vault and soon struck into an alley which led toward the overseer's house.

'How long have you been loafing round this vineyard?' demanded the schoolmaster.

'Not long,' answered Juan. 'I yust come.'

'What have you heard?'

'I only come now,' returned the Mexican,

spreading out his palms with that aggravating gesture peculiar to his people. 'I hear nothing but the wind. What could I hear?'

'What did you mean by bringing me that lying letter this morning?' asked Jeffries.

'I did not write him. What lie?'

'You are a fool—an ignorant fool,' uttered the schoolmaster savagely.

By this time they had crossed several terraces and were some little distance from the vault, but a cry, a distant, smothered cry, 'Help, help!' reached their ears.

Juan stopped and held up his hand.

'Listen! I hear somedings!'

'You'll hear little enough in this world if you don't do as I tell you!' cried Jeffries passionately. 'Come along. In front of me, mind.'

And so the two men vanished among the vines.

Jack sat on the stone floor of the vault with his head in his hands, endeavouring to think collectedly.

'He is gone, the cowardly ruffian,' he mused. 'Now I am certain that he is the murderer, and he felt my threats more than he dared show. I



must get out of here. I must be at Lone Pine Knob in time.'

He rose and made a careful examination of the cell. It was sunk in the earth as Jack well knew, only the face being exposed, where a slight slope of the ground had been cut down for the purpose. The interior was bricked and lined with cement throughout. Obviously the only point where an attack could be made with any hope of success was on the gate itself, and this was composed of stout iron bars, each thicker than a man's thumb. It seemed a hopeless chance, but Scott had no other, and, taking out his knife, he started on his task.

This knife of Jack's was no penknife, but a large, heavy, many-bladed affair which he had bought in San Francisco as a good companion in the wilderness for which he was bound. It comprised a saw, gimlet, stirrup-punch and many other attachments, as well as one which in its owner's present predicament was worth all the rest put together. This was a stout, substantial file, and with this Jack attacked the centre bar, working hard and talking to himself to keep up his courage.

'Capital bit of steel that! I believe it will

do it. Jeffries is the man—not a doubt of it now, though I wish I had stripped the coat from his back and examined his arm. No doubt he bore the mark of Cain. That scar, if I could show it, would weigh more with the Vigilantes as a piece of evidence than all the rest put together.'

He worked long and patiently before he paused and examined the bar to see what progress he had made. He had cut a deep gash in the iron, and though his hands were chafed and sore, and his arms ached from the unwonted toil, he felt reasonably certain that he could win his way to liberty. He had calculated that the removal of one bar would leave an opening through which he could pass; but then the bar must be filed through at top and bottom. Could he accomplish this and still be in time at Lone Pine Knob? He struck a match and consulted his watch. Twenty minutes past eight. So he had been three hours, perhaps, at work, and the first cut did not reach much more than half-way through the iron. He felt that he must do better than this, and yield to neither fatigue nor pain if he would win his freedom.

He flung aside his coat and went to work

again. His hands grew so tender that he was obliged to wrap his handkerchief round the handle of the knife, and from the constrained position he was forced to assume every muscle ached, and sometimes he could not repress a cry as he was seized with a torturing cramp. But he was making distinct progress and he sawed on, the perspiration rolling from every pore, and his breath coming quick and short as he bent to his task. The thought of Lucy nerved him. It would be terrible to die and leave her; but if he died dishonoured! He shuddered at the idea. Of course Jeffries would lead a party in quest of him, and would so contrive as to discover him as if accidentally. Then no explanation of his would be listened to. It would be naturally assumed that he had sought shelter in the vault, and had inadvertently imprisoned himself. He would be butchered without mercy.

But he believed that he could cut his way out in time. He dared not stop to look at his watch, for every moment was precious, but he felt that he was making good progress.

A sharp snap, followed by a ringing clatter echoed through the place, and Jack's hand,

meeting no resistance, slid along the bars. The blade had broken and the file had fallen outside beyond his reach. The misfortune was irreparable, and the young fellow's courage gave way before it. His last thought was of Lucy, as he sank swooning on the cold, hard floor of the vault.

CHAPTER XXIII

A MILE or more north of San Pablo, a spur running westward from the foothills ends in an abrupt eminence which, though of no great height, is a tolerably conspicuous object in the neighbourhood, owing to its isolation and peculiar shape. It is nearly circular, and its steep sides and flattened top give it the appearance of one of the old-fashioned straw bee-hives that are still sometimes seen in rustic gardens. This odd-looking hill is clothed with a sparse growth of pine trees. Owing to its sandy soil and complete exposure to the prevailing ocean winds, there is none of the rank luxuriance of undergrowth which characterises most of the ravines and valleys of the coast range. On the level round summit stands a single redwood, no giant like its relatives of Northern California, but dwarfed and stunted by its uncongenial position. Toward the Pacific, its trunk is branchless for

many feet, but toward the inland spread various gnarled limbs, as if all the vitality of the tree had shrunk away from the unwelcome salt breezes.

Such is Lone Pine Knob, a well-known landmark on the coast near San Pablo, and around the solitary redwood, in various attitudes, the Avengers grouped themselves, awaiting the hour at which Jack Scott had promised to return, with or without the murderer.

It was a glorious moonlight night. Westward the broad Pacific stretched like a silver shield to the horizon, eastward undulated the low foothills, gradually rising as they drew nearer the hidden line of the coast range. North and south stretched a level solitude, broken only by a few twinkling lights in the distance where the village of San Pablo nestled between sea and mountain. And the grim band of masked men, stretched in attitudes of expectance or whispering in knots, gave the needed touch of life to the solemn beauty of the picture.

'I wonder if the Sheriff saw us start?' remarked Field uneasily.

'Don't believe he did,' returned Smith, to

whom the question had been addressed. 'He was inside the hotel when we vamoosed. Not that it makes much difference, though. Sam knows where the meeting was called, and he'll be after us as soon as he drops to it that we've cleared.'

'I wish he wouldn't come,' said Field.

'So do I, but he'll come. Anyhow, I don't think we'll have any necktie and suspender sociable this night.'

'Why not? Do you think Jack Scott won't show up?' inquired Boone, who had drawn near the speakers.

''Pears like it, Judge,' answered Smith. 'Where's he been keeping himself all the evening, if he meant to do the square thing by us?

'I'm beginning to dislike this job most confoundedly,' remarked Boone, shaking his broad shoulders with the action of a water-dog.

'Why?' inquired Field in the pert intrusive manner to which he owed his nickname of Foxy.

'Why?' repeated the Judge. 'Well now; come here. What'll you do if Jack Scott turns up?'

'We'll hang him, of course.'

'Looks kinder cold-blooded, don't it? See,' urged the Judge, waxing more earnest, 'the lad comes here alone and gives himself up because his time is out.'

'No more'n he ought to do,' interjected Smith.

'I suppose so,' replied Boone; 'but it looks hard. I took kindly enough to the job when it was to be done off-hand. The delay has sort o' shaken the sand out of me.'

'We've sworn to maintain the peace of the county and put down outrage and murder with a high hand,' spouted Field in his oratorical manner.

'That's a fact,' sighed the Judge. 'D'ye reckon he'll come?'

'If he's a man of his word he'll come,' replied Field.

'Man of his word be derned,' retorted Boone. 'This is a life and death matter. If you were in his place, would you come yourself?'

Field hesitated.

'I—I trust that I shall never find myself in such a position,' he said after a moment's pause.

'If you mean by that, that any of the boys

would let you off on your promise to show up, you're about right, I reckon,' sneered the Judge. 'When your time comes you'll be hanged prompt enough. No one would take your word for twenty-four hours, Mr. Foxy Field.'

'That was not my meaning at all,' cried the other, turning away angrily.

One man stood alone near the slope of the Knob that overlooked the ocean. He glanced nervously at his watch every few minutes, and occasionally gazed upward at the moon, as though from her position in the heavens he would determine the flight of time.

'The last obstacle is removed,' he muttered. 'I have followed the path marked out for me by fate, even to the end, and the reward will follow. Kate will be mine. She cannot continue this vain struggle with destiny.'

A slouching figure crept up among the pine trees. It was Corvey. Luck had been against him during the evening and little liquor had come in his way, so he followed the Avengers on their midnight march in the hopes of deriving some stimulus from the milder excitement of manslaughter; but he kept himself carefully in the background, for the Vigilantes

were all respectable men, and he feared they might resent his presence.

Field had moved across toward Jeffries.

'Time must be nearly up, isn't it?' he remarked.

Field spoke aloud, and several drew their watches from their pockets and consulted them.

'I must have stopped, I think,' said Jeffries, peering at the dial in the moonlight. 'I'm only twenty-six minutes past.'

'Then you're fast,' returned the Judge, 'for it's only twenty-three past. He has seven minutes still.'

'I don't reckon it that way,' replied the schoolmaster. 'It was at twenty minutes past eleven last night that we granted twenty-four hours.'

'Your watch was going then, was it?' queried Boone dryly.

'It was,' answered Jeffries.

'And has been galloping ever since, I'll warrant. No, no! I said till half-past eleven with my own mouth, and the man that wants to dock a second of that time will have to argue the point with me.'

This remark silenced Jeffries. In the language of San Pablo, 'The Judge was a bad man to fool with.'

'Suppose he doesn't come then?' demanded Field.

Jeffries broke in again:

'If he doesn't come, that'll prove him to be the murderer past peradventure. We'll search the whole county for him, and he will be shot if he is caught.'

'He'll come sure enough,' remarked the Judge stolidly.

'I don't think so,' returned the schoolmaster.

'And what in thunder do *you* know about it?' demanded the other.

Jeffries quailed at the tone of the question.

'Nothing, nothing; only it isn't likely,' he stammered.

'You mean you'd vamoose middling lively if you was in his place,' commented Boone in a contemptuous voice; 'but you and Jack Scott ain't the same breed, I reckon.'

'Boys,' said Jeffries, turning to the men who had lounged up to listen to the discussion, 'it's clear the Judge has gone back on us.

His grit is gone, and he isn't the man to put the job through.'

The schoolmaster possessed no rhetorical arts, but he usually was careful to suit his language to his audience.

The Judge was nettled at the charge, and taunted Jeffries with his fright at the supposed ghost, but the story was by this time familiar to every one on the ground; and beyond a renewal of the laugh at Haman's expense, Boone's repartee accomplished nothing. The schoolmaster took the ridicule unconcernedly and proceeded with his argument:

'Nerve and courage are two different things. Now, look here, boys; it's come to this. With Judge Boone, or without Judge Boone, we've got to keep our oaths, and vindicate San Pablo's reputation for law and order. You had the murderer in your hands last night; the rope was round his neck. Contrary to my advice, and in compliance with Judge Boone's decision, you let him go, on the understanding that he would show up here to-night. I didn't suppose any man in his senses would have taken Jack Scott's word for such a thing, but you chose to take it, and I'd nothing to say. Now

he's off. I don't think he's got clear of the neighbourhood, for no one's seen him on the road, and we can't find that he's had any waggon. He's hiding somewhere around, and it's our business to look him out, and when we find him, no more palavering and slippery business, but just shoot him on sight, for a murderer who's broken his bail is no better than a wild beast.'

The schoolmaster's speech was received with applause, and the men evidently only waited for a signal to scour the country in search of the fugitive.

'Is time up?' inquired Field.

'Time is up,' responded Haman.

'You lie; it isn't,' said the Judge curtly. 'I thou't your watch had stopped, Ham Jeffries.'

'Look at your own, then. My watch is right enough. Come, boys, get to work. I'll lead a gang to search the vineyard first.'

'Stop!' shouted Boone in a voice of thunder. 'Hold hard, boys. Give the devil his due. He has five seconds—he—time's up!'

But even as Judge Boone was speaking, a breathless man dashed through the pine trees on the eastern slope of the Knob, and Jack Scott emerged in the moonlight on the summit.

'Here I am, gentlemen, on time I hope.'

The effect of Jack's appearance was various on the different members of the Committee of Safety. Some, struck by so much courage and devotion, could hardly restrain their applause, and the Judge, yielding to an impulse he could not control, stepped forward and grasped the young man's hand.

'On time, lad, on the nick of it,' he said.

Field, Smith, and one or two others consulted together apart; while Jeffries, mute and terror-stricken, crowded close against the trunk of the solitary redwood, and asked himself how it was possible for Jack to have escaped, and marvelled if fate reserved a triumph for this man after all.

'Have you brought the murderer?'

In the pause that followed the Judge's question the young man's quick breathing could be heard, and they saw in his flushed brow and heaving breast evidence of the desperate efforts he had put forth to keep his word. All hung upon his answer in silence, while the low distant boom of the Pacific came up to their ears mingled with the voices of the forest night.

'I have not brought the murderer with me,' answered Jack resolutely, 'because if I mistake not he is here already.'

A general buzz of wonder and inquiry arose from the crowd which pressed eagerly around Scott, while Haman Jeffries, listening with his very soul, pressed ever closer and closer to the trunk of the redwood, and readjusted the crape mask he wore with a trembling hand.

'Is Haman Jeffries here?' demanded Scott.

There was no reply, and he repeated the words.

'Is Haman Jeffries here?'

Field stepped forward.

'Silence, prisoner,' he cried. 'It isn't your place to ask questions. Nobody here has a name—mind that.'

Haman raised his head. He had an ally still, it would seem. Then the man's native audacity reasserted itself and he slowly came forward into the circle, but he kept the mask closely fastened.

'Gentlemen,' cried Jack, 'I must be heard, otherwise the parole you accepted from me last night was purposeless. You gave me twenty-four hours to find the murderer. I ask now for less than as many minutes to expose him.'

'Go ahead, Jack,' uttered the Judge heartily. 'You've kept your word and you shall have fair time to say all you want to.'

'Thank you,' replied Jack. 'Well, gentlemen, I must admit that my proof is not quite complete. But listen. There is a man in San Pablo—he may be here now, but I cannot distinguish him—who saw the murdered man's cousin this morning, and, impressed by the likeness, he thought it was Dick Morley's ghost. He fell on——'

Jack was interrupted by a burst of derisive laughter from the crowd.

'Why, that's Ham Jeffries' ghost story,' remarked the Judge.

'It is Jeffries I am speaking of——' began Jack.

'Yah!' broke in Field; 'we know all about it. He told us himself.'

'Well, gentlemen,' repeated Jack, 'all I can say is that I met Jeffries in the vineyard this afternoon; that I had a conversation with him——'

The Judge turned sharply on Jeffries.

'Why didn't you tell us you had seen Scott?' he asked.

'Because I hadn't,' responded Jeffries without hesitation. 'I hear of it now for the first time.'

'I am glad the lie has not choked you,' shouted Jack, 'since it has at least betrayed your identity. This man not only spoke to me in the vineyard, but he locked me up in the vault, so that I might not be able to keep my appointment with you here.'

'Am I called upon to deny such silly falsehoods?' demanded the schoolmaster. 'Since when has Mr. Scott been such a weakling that I could drag him to the lock-up at my will as I might an unruly schoolboy? This is the effect of despair, gentlemen. He has found himself unable to escape, so comes forward at the eleventh hour to accuse me of this crime.'

The mob was divided in opinion. Though many were inclined to believe Jack Scott, it seemed, as the schoolmaster had pointed out, scarcely intelligible that a delicate man such as he was could imprison against his will a young athlete like Scott. Besides, Jeffries had set out and returned with the picnic. It was difficult to imagine how such a scene as that at which Jack hinted could have happened without

witnesses, for, lonely as the vineyard was in general, on that particular day it had been quite otherwise.

While the men debated these points, the Hon. Pat Byrne, closely followed by Juan Estudillo, climbed the slope and appeared on the Knob.

'I'll say wan thing to yez, boys,' said the Hon. Pat, wiping his brow, for the climb had been severe and he was unused to exercise, 'I'll tell ye wan thing. That's the finest young fellow yer town iver had or iver will have; I just let him out o' quod in that vault o' mine beyant, an' widout sayin' by yer lave or wid yer lave or even so much as I thank ye kindly, he was off across hill an' hollow to thry and mek betther nor a mile in tin minutes for fear he'd kape ye waitin'. There's politeness for yez. Murder indade! Don't tell me. Did iver any wan see a murderer stip up an' face the music like that young fellow's doin'?'

'It's no use, Mr. Byrne,' remarked Smith dogmatically. 'We gave Scott twenty-four hours to find the murderer. Now he's here with an absurd impossible yarn about Ham Jeffries, which I for one won't believe and can't.'



'Blood for blood was law before ever Judge Lynch held court,' muttered Pete sullenly.

The current was evidently beginning to set against Scott, the more strongly as the men regarded Jack's story as a dastardly attempt to fasten the guilt on an innocent man, for no shadow of suspicion had arisen to link Haman Jeffries with the crime.

A hoarse, ominous murmur arose from the mob, and more than one voice was heard calling for prompt and exemplary vengeance. A faint 'whish' cut the air as a riato was uncoiled and flung over a bough of the redwood, and once more the ghastly noose dangled visible in the moonlight.

'Step up to the front, Juan,' said Byrne, urging forward the Mexican who had hitherto crouched shrinking in the background; 'step up like a man and tell the boys all you told me.'

But the Irishman's interference and the Mexican's evidence came too late. The passions of the men were all aroused, and Field, Jeffries, Smith, and others, clamoured for an immediate fulfilment of the purpose which had brought them together.

As Juan advanced trembling, supported by Byrne, there was a sudden forward rush of the crowd which bore them back, and Smith's voice shouted:

'Lively, boys; lively—before the Sheriff gets here, and we have all last night's trouble over again.'

But at this moment an unexpected occurrence once more snatched Jack from the very jaws of death.

The attention of all present was riveted on the scene beneath the tree; rude hands had seized on the young man and hustled him forward; Judge Boone stood apart with folded arms, realising that matters had passed beyond his control. Pat Byrne, forced to the outside edge of the crowd, struggled vainly to break through, when suddenly Kate Morley stood in the centre of the swaying, heaving, circle of men.

No one knew from whence she came: no one had seen her approach. She might have dropped from the skies among the turbulent throng which paused in its murderous work and drew back for a moment, startled at her unexpected appearance.

She was quick to take advantage of the sensation she had produced. Pushing forward till she stood close to Scott, released for the instant from the hands that held him, she turned and confronted the ring of menacing figures and masked faces.

'Stop, stop,' she cried. 'It is impossible that this man can be guilty of the crime you charge him with. Hear me.'

As she stood there, her cheeks flushed and her eyes ablaze with excitement, her magnificent hair, loosened in her hurried race through the woods, streaming wildly round her, and her bosom heaving with breathless eagerness, she looked like some goddess of the mountains come to vindicate the sanctity of her dwelling.

Jeffries, who had been in the front rank of the Avengers, cowered in her presence, and sought to shrink back through the crowd, but the cordon behind him was too closely drawn.

The murmur of astonishment and admiration that had greeted Kate's appearance died out, and in the silence that ensued, Pat Byrne's voice sounded grotesque and his words absurd and whimsical as he shouted:

'If the dacent woman has a word of evidence to give, sure ye'll hear it.'

The feelings of the Vigilantes relieved themselves in a burst of laughter which had something hysterical in its discord with the situation. This last intervention in Scott's behalf had been so unlooked for, so bewildering in its suddenness, that the nerves of many a man quivered now, who had never owned the existence of nerves before.

'You do well to laugh,' cried Kate, indignantly, 'you who have banded together to commit an inhuman, an atrocious murder. There is no justice in you. You accuse Mr. Scott of shooting my husband. The thing is impossible. When the shot was fired'—she hesitated, and bent her head, while a hot wave of blood touched cheeks and brow and neck with crimson, but in an instant she was erect again, and fearlessly facing the shame and scorn her words must entail—'when the shot was fired, Mr. Scott was in the store—with me.'

The pent-up breath escaped from many a bosom as they turned to each other, wondering and bewildered, to ask what manner of woman this must be to dare such a confession after a

silence and under circumstances which gave it so dark a meaning. Jack, stunned and thunderstruck, attempted to falter forth a few words of denial, but in no one did Mrs. Morley's confession work so striking and instantaneous a change as in Jeffries.

He had been pushing his way, silently and steadily, as far back into the crowd as he could, but at Kate's words he sprang forward to the centre again.

'It is a lie, and a clumsy lie,' he shouted. 'The prisoner and the witness both know that it is a lie! Scott was not in the store. He had just started for the village; there was no one in sight. My testimony I will swear to, which is more than Mrs. Morley would care to do for hers.'

Jack stepped forward and confronted him.

'How do you know I was outside?' he demanded. 'No one could have been there but the murderer! Are you he?'

Jeffries recoiled a step, but Scott followed him and seizing him by the shoulder rent the fabric of his coat from wrist to elbow. The schoolmaster struggled, but he was like a child in the grasp of a giant. The shirt and a rude

bandage were torn from his forearm, disclosing a long superficial wound such as might have been occasioned by the glancing blow of a knife.

Holding Haman's wrist in a vice-like grip, Scott raised the mutilated arm so that all might see it. Everything had passed so quickly that there had been no time for interference even if anyone desired to attempt it. Now the throng pressed closer, and examined the wound with eager, questioning eyes.

'There it is, gentlemen,' continued Jack; 'the mark of Cain: a mark you can all read. The sign-manual of the murdered man whereby he has branded his murderer!'

And tearing the mask from Haman's face, Jack released the arm and mingled with the crowd.

'Now look what that man did,' shouted Pat. 'He trapped that lad into my vault and shut him up there. Juan heard him and saw him do it; and like the good greaser he is, he out with his mustang an' galloped ivery fut of the way into San Antonio to fetch me back to let Jack Scott out.'

'Si, Señor,' assented Juan.

Judge Boone turned on Jeffries with an oath.



'You d——d villainous traitor,' he shouted.

'Murderer first, traitor afterwards,' cried Jack. 'Twice this man attempted Morley's life; once with a knife—he failed then, and got this scar that marks him for the gallows. Once with a pistol; the pistol poor Dick gave him to return to me: and then he succeeded, only to seek my life, too, by your aid and that yonder.'

Jack pointed to the dangling rope, while Judge Boone spoke to the Vigilantes.

'What's the verdict of this Committee as to Jack Scott?'

There was a universal cry of 'Not guilty,' which rolled its echoes far down the hillside.

Meanwhile Pat Byrne was supporting the almost fainting form of Kate Morley.

'Cheer up, me dear crathur,' urged the kind-hearted Irishman. 'Sure Jack's safe, and as for what you've said—not a wan believed it; divil a sowl. Jack, come here, can't you, an' help me get the lady home. It's swounding she is.'

Between them Jack and Byrne assisted Kate down the steep hillside. Before they had gone very far they met Mr. Starkweather and Lucy. The girl had insisted on accompanying her father

as soon as he discovered that the Vigilantes had left San Pablo.

Jeffries had not spoken a word since the murder had been brought home to him. He was seated under the redwood, closely surrounded by the Vigilantes, who held a hurried deliberation as to his fate. Once only did he rouse himself with some show of interest, when he saw Jack and Kate vanish among the pines.

'Oh, that woman, that woman!' he muttered. 'It was fate! It has been written for a million years that this will happen so. A curse on my blindness that could not read my dream aright. The branch in the likeness of Jack Scott was never broken.'

Then he buried his face in his hands and refused to look up again.

Jack was warmly greeted by the Sheriff, and in a few words the latter was made acquainted with the changed position of affairs. His next question was as to Haman Jeffries.

'I left him up there at the top of Lone Pine Knob,' answered Jack. 'Where are you going?' as Starkweather turned abruptly away.

'I am going to arrest the man,' replied

Sam, 'and save him from the mob, if I am in time,' he added as he strode up the hill.

Byrne looked from Jack toward Starkweather and hesitated; but seeing that Mrs. Morley stood in no further need of assistance he hastened after the Sheriff.

Kate was her own calm self again. She turned to Jack and extended her hand.

'The danger is all over now, Mr. Scott. I will say good-bye.'

'Oh, I will see you home,' answered Jack quickly.

'Indeed, there is no necessity,' replied Kate; 'you must stay with Miss Starkweather. Won't you say good-bye? I shall scarcely see you again.'

'Are you really going to Memphis?' inquired Jack.

'I shall scarcely see you again, either of you,' replied Kate quietly. 'Do you remember how we watched for the dawn this morning, Lucy? I shall often think of that. May the sun of happiness that has this day risen on both your lives never set! God bless you, Mr. Scott. Good-bye, Lucy. Be very good to him, for he

is worthy of it, and he has come to you through many perils.'

She pressed a quick kiss on Lucy's forehead and disappeared among the trees.

'Do you know, Jack,' said Lucy after a moment's silence; 'don't think I'm jealous a bit, but—I think she was very fond of you, dear.'

'You foolish little woman,' he returned, 'you must not imagine everyone has your bad taste.'

And so they lingered in the fragrant gloom of the pines, while Kate Morley carried her desolate heart to her desolate home.

CHAPTER XXIV

RATHER more than a year after Jack Scott's memorable tryst at Lone Pine Knob, the Hon. Pat Byrne stood in the Plaza of San Pablo waiting for the arrival of the San Antonio coach; for a semi-weekly stage line had been established by his enterprise. The hon. gentleman was attired in a brand-new frock coat and an extra shiny hat, while his other garments were of corresponding magnificence. He wore a neck-tie which would have been worthy of Solomon in all his glory, and a rosebud nestled in the lappel of his coat. Evidently Mr. Byrne was expecting company.

From time to time he consulted his watch and shook his head, muttering that it would be necessary 'to give Every-Day Pete a taste o' discipline or he'd never larn to drive a coach,' but in due time the stage did arrive, and the Hon. Pat had the pleasure of assisting his fair friend, once Miss Carrie Van Zandt, to alight, while

Jimmy Ruggles climbed down from the driver's box unaided.

'Sure, it's a sight fer sore eyes to see ye, me dear young lady,' cried Byrne, raising his hat with ceremonious politeness. 'It's raal tasty and charming ye're lookin'. Ah, there's nothing like mattheromony fer the young an' beeootiful.' And the Hon. Pat, with a killing air, pressed his right hand on the left side of his white waistcoat.

'Tell us all the news, Mr. Byrne,' said Ruggles, as they walked across to the hotel, where the Irishman had insisted on the travellers partaking of a 'thrifle o' lunch at my expense,' before proceeding to their destination.

'Let me collect me idays,' returned Pat with a glance at Carrie. 'It's a year since I've basked in the smiles of beauty.'

Mrs. Ruggles blushed and bridled at this outspoken compliment, but Pat was a privileged character, and her husband only laughed.

'Well,' said Byrne, when the little party were seated and he had ascertained by the only test that the champagne was iced to the proper temperature; 'Well, in the first place ye'll have a welcome from Mr. and Mrs. Scott that'll mek yer

hair curl, an' ye'll see the purtiest baby in the state. I'm his godfather!'

Jimmy congratulated their host on his new dignity, and Pat resumed:

'Ye'll see a vineyard workin' too—not a dissolute mess o' grapes an' foliage like it was last year. Ah, thim was terrible times!'

'Terrible, indeed!' assented Ruggles, while his wife drew nearer to him with a little shiver. 'You've had no Vigilance Committees since, I hope?'

'The divil a wan,' replied Pat. 'Ye'll excuse me, me dear young lady, but it's so long since I've basked in the smiles of beauty that I'm forgittin' me manners; but we've had nothin' o' the soort since. Sheriff Starkweather niver cud cease blamin' himsilf whin he found he'd come too late. He said he'd no call iver to have lift their heels, but they slipped out o' town unbeknownst, an' sure what cud he ha' done av he'd been in it, itself! But I tell ye, he put the fear o' the Lord in thim fellows' hearts whin he saw what they done. Oh, it was an awful sight to see that poor misguided loonytick Ham Jeffries swinging there in the moonlight on Lone Pine Knob. Not but what he desarved it. He only

met the death he was plannin' fer another, but still hanging's a thing that should be done dacently an' not by a gang o' roughs in hot blood.'

'Were there any prosecutions?' inquired Ruggles.

'Well, there came near bein', but sure what was the good? The whole town was in it, an' as I was saying', they've been quiet since, an' I think the nighness o' their makin' a mistake wid Jack Scott—an' there's not a man in San Pablo more rispicted an' looked up to this day—give 'em a lesson. Besides that, the town's grown quieter since the strikes, an' the Sheriff does be here a good share o' the time, fer he's just wrapped up in his grandson.'

'I suppose we'll see him while we're with Lucy, then?' asked Carrie.

'Ye will av ye aren't blind, for he's in it now. Tell me, Mr. Ruggles, do ye iver hear anything o' yer cousin, Mrs. Morley?'

'Very little,' answered Jimmy, 'she is still in Memphis, I believe. She won golden opinions from everyone by her nursing in the terrible epidemic last year. I have a clipping from a Southern paper—no, it isn't in this pocket, but

it speaks in the highest terms of her unselfishness and devotion.'

'An' she's at it yet?' inquired Byrne.

'She will never leave it,' replied Ruggles. 'Some women seem to have a mission for that kind of life, and her heart is in it. Of course this year there has been little fever, and her work is much lighter.'

'She writes to Mrs. Scott ivery wanst in a while,' said Pat, 'an' whin the baby kem she sint a lot of beeootiful imbroidery work, med expressly be her own hand. She was good-hearted, poor sowl.'

'She was, indeed,' replied Carrie earnestly; and with this tribute, Kate Morley's name passed from the conversation, though Mr. and Mrs. Ruggles found that it had frequent mention in the Scott household, and was always linked with terms of gratitude and respect.

'How's the paper, "The Independent," getting along?' inquired Jimmy, with professional interest. 'Does Scott run it?'

'Indade an' he doesn't,' answered Pat indignantly. 'Mr. Scott is me partner, an' has more important things to look afther nor a rubbishin'

newspaper—axin' your pardon, Mr. Ruggles, an' manin' no disrispict to yer callin', but the thing niver ped anyhow: so afther I give Field the sack, I niver looked fer another iditor, but just discontinued publication.'

'I saw Field in San Francisco,' remarked Ruggles.

'Did ye, indade?' asked Pat. 'An' what might he be doin' there?'

'Oh, Bohemianising around on the outskirts of journalism, and drinking himself to death as fast as he can,' answered Jimmy, who had seen too many bright men go to ruin in the same way to have much pity to spend on Chamberlain Field.

But Pat Byrne looked grave, and there was a note of compassion in his voice, as he said, 'Ah, thin, that's a pity, fer wid all his faults Foxy was a gintleman and a scholar.'

'Is that your team, Mr. Byrne?' inquired Carrie, glancing out of the window and admiring a handsome road waggon with a fine pair of horses drawn up in front of the hotel.

'That's what it is, me dear young lady,' answered the Hon. Pat. 'An' I'm goin' to have the pleasure of drivin' yersilf an' yer worthy

husband out to me partner's house when ye've had yer lunch.'

'I've done,' said Ruggles rising, and as Carrie protested that she could not eat another morsel Mr. Byrne was fain to accept her assurance and establish her in the seat of honour in his carriage.

'Jack has a raal purty house, wid an ilegant view o' the say about two miles out o' town. It's pay-day at the vineyard, or he'd ha' been here to mate ye himself, an' as fer his wife—sure wait till ye see the baby an' ye'll say she has excuse enough.'

'A pretty house, a noble view indeed,' remarked Ruggles as they came in sight of Jack's home, and saw Lucy waving her welcome from the front porch. 'Jack ought to be a happy man.'

'An' so he is, an' why wouldn't he be?' returned Byrne. 'Sure he has all that heart can wish, an' a good conscience to the boot o' it.'

A loving wife, a sufficiency of this world's goods, and the esteem and affection of all who knew him. Such was Jack Scott's lot in life. The blessing called down in Kate Morley's parting words was fulfilled in overflowing

measure, and Lucy thanked God night and morning for her husband, and forgot to shudder at the dangers he had escaped.

As Kate Morley said, 'he had come to her through many perils.'

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